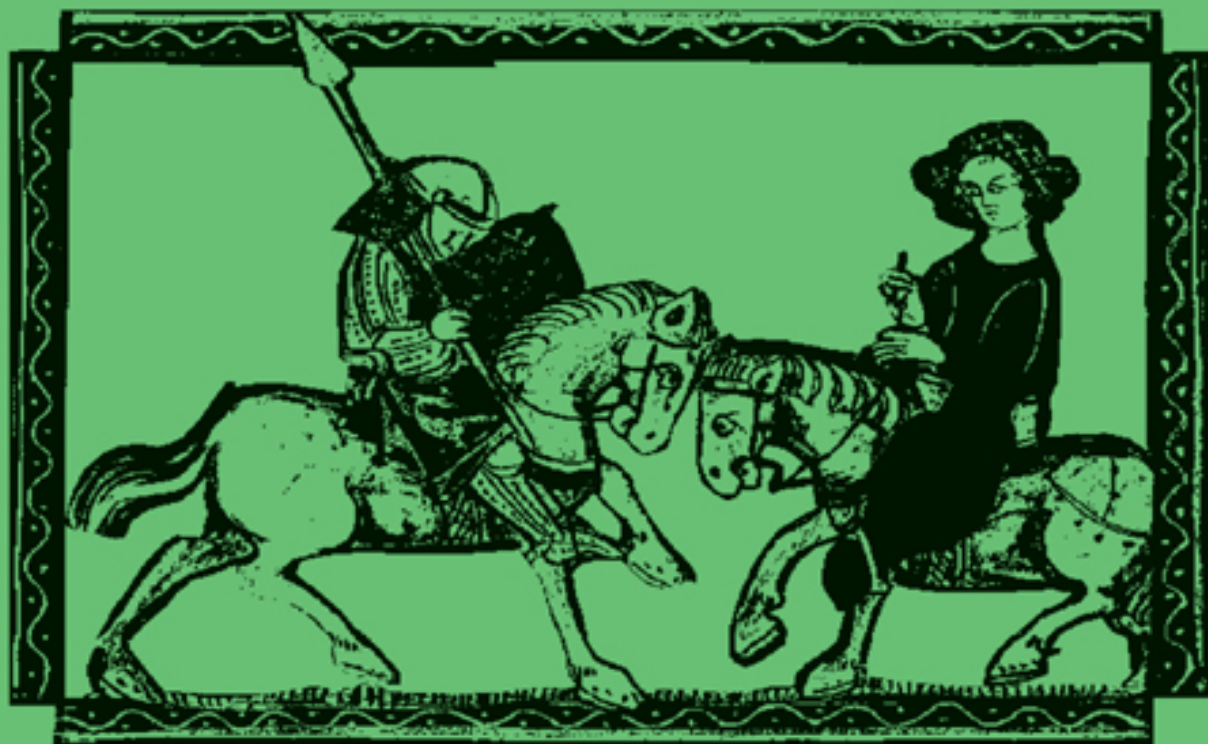


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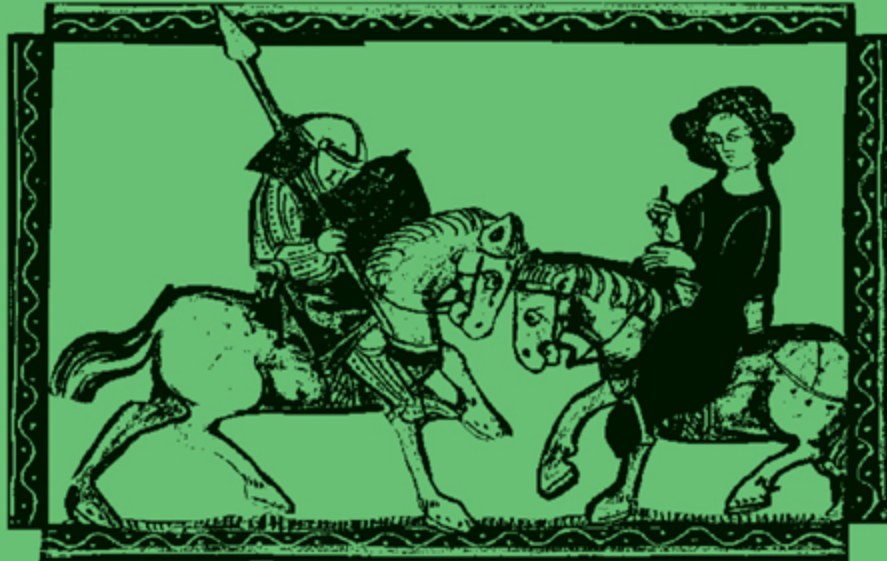


FAIRIES *in*
MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

James Wade



THE NEW MIDDLE AGES



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For my parents, Eric and Doylanne

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INTRODUCTION: INTERNAL FOLKLORE

As beings neither angelic nor demonic, fairies constitute the ambiguous supernatural in romance. From their first literary appearances in the Old French *Lais* to their representations in the early printed romances of the late sixteenth century, fairies are portrayed as ontologically unique figures who possess the ability to do things that are unexpected, unprecedented, and otherwise impossible. They come from the Otherworld (distinct from the worlds of ordinary humanity and orthodox theology), and on account of these supernatural origins they are free not only from the physical laws of normal time and space, but also from the standard laws of logic, and from the moral strictures of ordinary human interaction. It is these qualities, above all, that give fairies their unique narrative interest and their imaginative depth. Romance authors recognized this creative potential, and in a fully fictional form that allowed for, and even privileged, the presence of marvels and the supernatural, these authors used fairies to explore issues and achieve narrative effects that could not be accomplished in any other way. This book traces these functions, examining how fairies are represented and used across romance to fit different audience expectations and aesthetic purposes. A study of fairies in romance, however, cannot only be about the fairies themselves. Romances are always concerned, first and foremost, with the lives of men and women, and fairies are only important in romance narrative when they intrude upon the hero's or heroine's world, or when these human characters are led into their world. It is through this sort of interaction, this crossing between two worlds—the human and the Other—that fairies become narratologically significant, and thus it is on these interactions that this book focuses.

The concept of multiple worlds existing within a single romance text can be a useful way of thinking about how fairies function in romance. In tracing the use of supernatural figures and motifs across over 400 years of literary history, a large part of this project is concerned with tracking how

fairy conventions are established and maintained across time and literary modes. In thinking about this process of development, however, I have come to realize that what is most interesting and significant about fairy representations are in fact the variations, where there is an active manipulation of fairy conventions in order to fit different narrative, aesthetic, and imaginative purposes. In order to conceptualize these differences across romance, and to consider the potentialities of alternative worlds within romance, I have found it useful to draw from recent textual imaginings of possible worlds theory. Originally a Leibnizian concept, possible worlds theory was adopted and developed by literary theorists in the latter part of the twentieth century to address problems of narrative semantics, phenomenology, and fictionality.¹ Taken as a radical extension of Claude Bremond's notion of narrative as a "network of possibilities," in which the reader considers "alternative courses of events" as the story moves from action to action, this theory posits that the range of narrative possibilities within each text reflects a centripetal organization that makes their intra-narrative worlds autonomous—that is, ontologically and structurally distinct.²

Accordingly, in relation to the "actual world" (the world where I am located and that I consider to exist independent of me), there exists an infinite number of possible worlds that are products of mental activities, such as dreaming, imagining, and storytelling.³ Fictional texts, therefore, as the products of storytelling, constitute worlds that are ultimately distinct from worlds beyond them. In other words, these text-worlds may share affinities with, and therefore remind us of, our own actual world, or of other fictional worlds, but ultimately they contain their own unique entities (characters, objects, places) and organizing principles (spatiotemporal relations and event and action sequences), and thus present a world, as Ruth Ronen describes, with its own "self-sufficient system of structures and relations."⁴ Within these worlds the rules of the "self-sufficient system" are made at the insistence of the author, and this sort of "sub-creation," as Tolkien called it, ultimately frees the author from extra-textual parameters and expectations, making each text essentially subjective in its construction, and, therefore, unique in its depiction of its imaginary world—a depiction that springs us into a narrative space never before experienced.⁵ As Gillian Beer says, "we have to depend entirely on the narrator of the romance: he

remakes the rules of what is possible, what impossible. . . . We are transported.”⁶

Northrop Frye, similarly, gets at this idea of transportation into a romance world when observing that “the hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended . . . enchanted weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established.”⁷ As Frye rightly notes, these postulates—the rules of a romance’s unique text-world—can be rather different from the postulates (or what we may perceive to be the postulates) of our actual world or of other fictional worlds, and it is this difference (and the possibilities inherent within it) that gives romance such imaginative potential. Adding to this potential, too, is the fact that a romance’s text-world can contain multiple internal worlds, including the worlds of the ambiguous supernatural. To adopt the term used by the author of the fourteenth-century romance *Thomas of Erceeldoune*, fairies come from “ane oþer countree,” a realm defined by its distinction from, and uniqueness to, the human worlds within romance.⁸ As originating from the Otherworld, and thus as inherently Other, perhaps, as Helen Cooper has suggested, in a fuller sense than almost any of the ways in which the term is used now, fairies are subject to an entirely different set of rules (or, as is often the case, to no perceivable rules at all).⁹

In order to conceptualize this worlds-within-worlds model as it applies to an analysis of fairies, I suggest that each romance text-world contains its own “internal folklore”—that in each romance containing the ambiguous supernatural there is a unique imagining of fairies and of the Otherworld at large.¹⁰ These text-worlds contain their own distinctive set of rules that the audience can expect to be followed, and attention to the internal folklore of a text provides an inroad for analyzing the reasons for, and effects of, each author’s construction of this intra-world coherence in fictional worlds, a unique construction that is necessary for the audience to make sense of the unusual and often unprecedented marvels that may occur. However, insisting on the inherent inimitability of the internal folklore contained within each romance is, of course, not to say that there are not continuities in fairy representations across texts, or that the continuities are accidental or insignificant. Indeed, we need to understand the commonalities in order to

grasp the significance of the differences. From a phenomenological standpoint, one of the advantages of possible worlds theory is that it highlights the importance of intertextuality. According to what Marie-Laure Ryan calls the “principle of minimal departure,” which states that when readers construct fictional worlds they fill in the gaps in the text by assuming a similarity with their own experience, other narratives participating in an audience’s imaginative network will always shade the reception of any given text—an intuitive actuality that romance authors utilized to their advantage.¹¹

Indeed, as this book will show, romance authors often took advantage of what Umberto Eco calls the “parasitical” nature of fictional worlds by relying on the conventions of fairy representations developed within given imaginative networks; by manipulating these conventions, and disrupting expectations, they created unique fairy worlds to serve their specific narrative and imaginative purposes.¹² This book, therefore, will examine the recurrence of fairy figures, motifs, and conventions across texts, but by stressing difference over continuity, borne out of this notion of internal folklore, it seeks to avoid the potential reductivism inherent in the more straightforward approaches to cross-textual examination. Such an approach, I believe, is essential to a study of fairies: what makes fairies most interesting—their mysteriousness, their tendency to behave arbitrarily or illogically, and what we might call their conceptual and narratological in-betweenness—is also what makes them resistant to the more traditional methodologies of comparative analysis.

Furthermore, a project concerned with the ways fairies function in romance cannot ignore the literary, cultural, and historical contexts within which these romances were produced. Indeed, just as the fairy presence in both insular and continental romance is chronologically extensive, from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the black letter romances of the sixteenth century, it is also, within this time, extraordinarily diverse. Such variability can be accounted for due to the indeterminate and, to a certain degree, unclassifiable nature of the ambiguous supernatural, and this difference from the norms of orthodox Christianity is reflected in the vocabulary used to signify fairies, or fairy-like beings. “Elf,” the first word used to denote the ambiguous supernatural in English, came into Middle English from the Anglo-Saxon “*ælf*,” which first emerges from oral tradition in *Beowulf*

(there “ylfe”).¹³ Sometime around the first quarter of the fourteenth century the French-derived “faerie” (from *fée*) came into Middle English as well, emerging in three romances collected in the Auchinleck manuscript, *Guy of Warwick*, *Sir Degarré*, and *Sir Orfeo*. As the multiple usages in the miscellany would suggest though, “faerie” was probably current in English oral culture some time before. By the last quarter of the fourteenth century, Chaucer was using fairy and elf interchangeably, along with the Latin-derived “incubus.” A term inherited from late antiquity, “incubus” held a long tradition of denoting evil spirits and demons with specifically sexual connotations, but by as early as *Laȝamon* (c.1200–1220) incubi were (in some cases) beginning to take on fairy characteristics. “Incubus,” though, was just one word among many in the Latin lexicon used to denote fairy, or something vaguely fairy-like. Words like “faun,” “satyr,” and more commonly, “nimpha,” were borrowed from classical mythology—but none of these stuck. Other words cropped up as well. Gervase of Tilbury describes “lamias” as fairy-like creatures in his *Otia Imperialia*, and over 250 years later the *Catholicon Anglicum*, an English-Latin wordbook of 1483, gives “lamia” as an equivalent for “elfe.”

Perhaps the most common Latin word for fairy, though, was “fata.” In Gervase of Tilbury’s account of Avalon, for example, he uses “Morganda fatata” for Morgan le Fay. Similarly, Walter Map uses “fatalita” to refer to Eadric Wild’s beautiful fairy mistress, and later, “a fatis” to refer to a group of dancing fairies another knight sees while riding alone through a forest. Etienne de Rouen uses “fatatus” to describe the inhabitants of Avalon in his *Draco Normannicus*, though he also refers to Morgan as “Morganis nympha perennis.”¹⁴ Such a diverse range of terms illustrates how the Latin lexicon, with its limited tools for discussing ambiguous beings, did not fit well with the fairies borne out of vernacular culture. Historians like Map and Gervase of Tilbury (along with theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas) did their best to mark out spaces for such ambiguous creatures in their constructions of cosmologies and theologies, but the lack of consistent signifiers meant that, at best, fairies remained ambiguous and liminal; or, perhaps at the same time, this relationship between signifier and signified operated vice versa. That is, their ambiguous nature resisted any concrete lexical markers. But while the ambiguous supernatural took on a range of connotations and diverse associations over this period, the manifestations of fairies in the romances were rather precisely delimited. These romances of

the high and late Middle Ages enjoyed a sophisticated audience for whom fairies may or may not have been literally true (that is, believed to exist in the actual world), but they were at least required to be taken seriously.¹⁵ Before the twelfth century, Anglo-Saxon elves were conceived rather differently, appearing in the extant sources as malignant folk-spirits of superstitious belief who were neither integrated into the networks of Anglo-Saxon imaginative literature nor developed as figures who mirrored the humans they existed parallel with in any significant degree of detail.¹⁶ Furthermore, at the other end of the spectrum, from roughly the late sixteenth century on, any possibility of belief slides rather quickly down the socioeconomic and educational scale, with the result that they were treated much more playfully, even at times sarcastically, in renaissance literature—especially on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage.¹⁷

Recognizing the historical specificity of fairies in medieval romance, Laurence Harf-Lancner takes this as a guiding principle in her study of the French tradition, and her general point is a sound one—that Morgan le Fay’s characterization in romance is a manifestation of the romances themselves, which are in turn creations of the literary and social contexts in which they were written.¹⁸ We can extend this statement to include fairies generally, and in addition to the historical, cultural, and literary currents underpinning the creation of romance, we can also emphasize the complex mixture of the individual imaginations and needs of the authors composing these texts. Indeed, it is the contention of this book that what drives creativity and difference in romance is primarily the world-constructing powers and intentions of individual authors, rather than change in historical or political conditions. And possible worlds theory, due to the weight it gives to “sub-creation,” provides a useful framework for thinking about the role of authorial invention, of *poiesis*—a creative energy that is often obscured or even ignored by too strong an emphasis on the determinism of historical conditions, generic conventions, and literary evolution.¹⁹

This latter factor, combined with an attention to the concerns of comparative mythology, has been the primary focus of the vast majority of fairy scholarship in the twentieth century. In terms of the development of this approach there can be little argument as to the influential role of Lucy Allen Paton. Her 1903 monograph *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance* paved the way for scholars such as J. A. MacCulloch,

John Revell Reinhard, and, most voluminously, Roger Sherman Loomis.²⁰ Throughout the work of these scholars there is an overarching concern with what C. S. Lewis calls the “anthropological approach,” that is, the examination of fairy motifs with the ultimate goal of tracing them back to an ancient (often Celtic or Teutonic) “original”; or, the inverse of this, reading fairies in medieval romance in light of their presumed Celtic or Teutonic “original.”²¹ While the question of “where medieval fairies come from” is, indeed, an interesting one to ask, it can add little to a project concerned with the ways fairies function in the specific texts in which they appear. The result of such readings is that they tend to interpret the abnormalities or inconstancies across fairy representations as degenerations of ur-myths, or ur-fairies—a tendency that sidelines the importance of both the sociohistorical contexts of these romances and the role of *poiesis*.

Recognizing the limits of this approach, C. S. Lewis’s own work on fairies, a short chapter called “The Longaevi” in his *Discarded Image*, outlines in broad strokes the place of fairies in medieval cosmologies, and, to a lesser extent, how this place affected their positionings in romance.²² It was not, however, until recently that Lewis’s work on the function of fairies in English romance was picked up again at any considerable length. This time Helen Cooper, in a chapter in her *English Romance in Time*, discussed the notion of fairies as a fully developed motif in romance that, like other romance motifs, mutates through time in order to fit different audience expectations or aesthetic purposes.²³ While Cooper’s work serves as a good foundation for thinking about the ways fairies are used across texts, her emphasis is slightly different from mine, as her study is primarily concerned with the reception of romance, especially in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The emphasis of this present study, conversely, will be on the creation of romance texts. By highlighting the world-constructing powers of the author, along with the literary and sociohistorical contexts at the moment of this creation, I intend to use the idea of internal folklore to underscore the individuality of fairy representations in their unique text-worlds. This approach, in many ways, intersects with Corinne Saunders’ recent *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*, which includes a chapter on Otherworlds and “faery.” But while Saunders recognizes that romance is of special interest for its “imaginative, fictional play” with the supernatural, her project is largely invested in situating romance within contemporary cultural attitudes toward the supernatural,

and the classical and biblical heritage of those attitudes.²⁴ Considering the internal folklore of a romance, however, provides an opportunity for attending to this question of fictional “play” more directly, as it will prove useful in thinking about the abnormalities and inconsistencies of fairy representations across distinctive texts and contexts. Indeed, such an approach will allow me to focus not only on what is most interesting about fairies in romance, but also on the particular logics of these texts developed out of specific authorial needs and strategies. In drawing on a range of interrelated approaches, therefore, I will not only develop a theoretical framework for analyzing the unique qualities that fairies bring to the worlds of their texts, but also, through this process, I will focus on the elaborate world-constructing techniques of the authors composing these romances. By introducing the concept of internal folklore, borne out of textual theorizations of possible worlds, this reading will emphasize the singularity of each romance through an assessment of how authors achieve particular narrative effects by picking up conventions and motifs circulating in their imaginative networks and manipulating them to serve their specific narrative needs. I call this reading a new intentionality, a revitalized and nuanced discussion of the world-constructing powers of the author. Attention to such an intentionality will not dwell on historicist constructions of biography, nor on any psychoanalytic attempts to answer questions of “what the author really meant,” but rather it will be more narratologically focused; it will be attentive to literary techniques and focus on narrative-constructing strategies in order to answer questions of “what, precisely, an author does,” and “how he or she goes about doing it.” Such an approach, I believe, is critically useful, for by focusing on the creation of a literary work, it provides an avenue for understanding the complex ways in which an author can situate an ultimately autonomous text within a given matrix of imaginative conventions to achieve unique narrative and aesthetic effects. Ultimately, such a reading aims to develop a new approach for understanding the internal logics of medieval romances, while also providing a clearer picture of what particular qualities fairies bring to their texts, how they function within their texts, and how they manage to instill their narratives with qualities no other figures can.

CHAPTER 1

FAIRIES AND HUMANS BETWEEN POSSIBLE WORLDS

But she was the moste hottest woman of all Breteigne and moste luxuriouse; and she was a noble clergesse, and of astronomye cowde she inough, for Merlin hadde hir taught . . . and so moche she sette theron hir entent and lerned so moche of egramauncye that the peple cleped hir afterward Morgain le Fee, the suster of Kynge Arthur, for the merveiles that she dide after in the contrey.

—Prose *Merlin*¹

The figure of Morgan le Fay is an ideal point of departure for thinking about fairies in romance. The long history of her representations both within and across romance text-worlds provides a case study for the way medieval romance saw a frequent though often erratic shift toward the rationalization of fairy figures, in which fairies were recast as mortals who obtained their supernatural powers through the study of nigromancy (black magic) and the liberal arts.² For Morgan, along with other such characters, this rationalization results not in an absolute suppression of her supernatural capacities, but rather in the eradication of her Otherworldly qualities—her fundamental autonomy from the affairs of men and women and her ultimate freedom from the logical and physical laws of the normal world. Such imaginings of Morgan's character proved useful for romance authors as they allowed her to be implicated more fully in the interworkings of the Arthurian court, an integration that ran parallel to her development as a major figure in the Arthurian tradition.³

As this quotation from the mid-fifteenth-century prose *Merlin* suggests, however, this humanization of Morgan's character required romance authors to give some sort of explanation. Morgan is a product of a complex intertextual, and, perhaps, extra-textual tradition. In no apparent

chronological or otherwise logical pattern she vacillates across romance between being the sister of Arthur skilled in magic and a fairy whose powers are intrinsic to her Otherworldly nature. This chapter is interested in mapping these various portrayals in order to think about the ways such shifts in her supernatural status reflect each romance's development of its unique internal folklore. But Morgan is not the only transitional figure of this sort in medieval romance, and what is remarkable about these texts is the consistency with which authors adopted, utilized, and developed such shifting characters—either across or within romance—to achieve certain narrative and aesthetic effects. As I will argue, it is through the integration and development of these figures that the internal folklores of their romances, the autonomous systems of structures and relations that constitute the internal logics of their text-worlds, are often left intentionally incoherent or underdeveloped. Romances such as these, which can be characterized by a sustained intra-narrative *illogic*, contain what I will call incomplete internal folklores, and it is the aim of this chapter to show how the authors of these romances used transitional figures to deliberately generate ambiguity and irresolvability within their text-worlds. With attention to the differences between fairies and humans within the internal folklores of certain romances, I will illuminate a persistent narrative strategy through which authors cultivated a functional indeterminacy in order to take advantage of the best qualities of both the human and fairy worlds.

“le Fay” across Romance

One of the conditions of an author borrowing a character from earlier texts is that though the attributes of the character may change, the name, the means of intertextual recognition, must remain constant. This poses something of a unique problem for renderings of Morgan because her name carries with it certain implications about her nature, about *what* she is, and as she shifts from being a fairy to being human across different text-worlds, her title “le Fay” becomes a superfluous and incongruous remnant of prior manifestations. The author of the prose *Merlin* attempts to explain this incongruity by retro-fashioning her name as a product of popular consciousness within the internal folklore of the romance. Her reputation as a wonder-worker, for the “merveiles that she dide,” as imagined within this

text-world, led to the false assumption that she was a fairy—“the peple cleped hir afterward Morgain le Fee”—an assumption manifested in the title that became integral to her character. Such an explanation works not only within the internal folklore of the prose *Merlin*, but also implies a certain intertextual application; it suggests (through its basis in an imagined general opinion) that depictions of Morgan in earlier romances were merely misappropriations of her powers, that she is and always has been a human—just one with some particularly fairy-like characteristics.

This sort of explanation seems to have been a satisfactory means by which romance authors could rationalize fairies into humans. Robert de Boron, the author of the twelfth-century *Merlin*, the source text for the *Merlin* of the Vulgate Cycle, on which the author of the English prose *Merlin* bases his translation, gives a similar explanation (though in a different context) for the origin of Morgan’s misappropriated name. Within the internal folklore of this romance it is because of Morgan’s knowledge of “astronomie” and “fisique,” and on account of her “mastrie de clergie,” that the people were so amazed by her deeds that they called her “Morgain la faee.”⁴ Another fairy figure, the Lady of the Lake who raises Lancelot as a foundling, becomes similarly rationalized. Chrétien, in the world of his *Lancelot* (c.1172), depicts his Lady of the Lake as fully supernatural, a *fee* who gives Lancelot a fairy talisman to aid him in times of need (2345–50).⁵ Also, in the world of his *Lanzelet* (a romance composed roughly a quarter-century later, though perhaps representing the earliest form of the Lancelot story), Ulrich von Zatzikhoven depicts his Lady of the Lake as fully fairy, a “merfeine” (water-fairy) of marvelous powers who inhabits an Avalon-esque realm of perpetually abundant flora populated by thousands of beautiful maidens and mermen (180–240).⁶ By the prose *Lancelot* (c.1214–27), however, this rationalizing bent refigures the Lady of the Lake as a human woman skilled in magic:

Or dist li contes que la damoisele qui Lancelot emporta el lac estoit une fee. A chelui tans estoient apelees fees toutes icheles qui savoient d’enchantement et moult en estoit a chelui tans en la Grant Bertaigne plus qu’en autres terres. Eles savoient, che dist li contes des Brethes Estoires, les forches des paroles et des pieres et des herbes, par quoi eles estoient tenues en joveneche et en biauté et en si grant riqueche com eles devoient.

[Now, according to the story, the damsel who carried Lancelot off into the lake was a fairy. At that time, the word “fairy” was used for all women who practiced magic, and at that time there were many more of them in Great Britain than in other lands. According to the story in the British

chronicles, they knew the powers of words and stones and herbs, which allowed them to retain youth and beauty and enjoy whatever wealth they wished.]]⁷

Much like Morgan's depiction in the prose *Merlin*, this rationalization of the Lady of the Lake holds certain intertextual reverberations, as it draws upon other texts existing within the audience's imaginative network in order to imagine a past in which enchantresses were mistaken for fairies. Such an imagined past, however, is more a simulacrum than an intertextual link, as it is primarily a device used by the author to construct the logic—that is, the self-sufficient system of rules and organizing principles—of the text's internal folklore. The result of such a logic has other implications as well. Just as the author of the prose *Lancelot* eradicates his Lady of the Lake's Otherworld qualities, so too, by correlation, does her Otherworld realm also become rationalized. And not only does this Lady of the Lake not have a supernatural island, but the lake she inhabits is not even really a lake (which would be evidence of more fully supernatural abilities)—it is a naturally terrestrial domain enchanted to appear as a lake. By eliminating any alternative world within the text-world of the romance, therefore, the author of the prose *Lancelot* also removes the supernatural possibilities associated with such worlds.

For Morgan, too, this loss of her fairy status results in the loss of her Otherworld realm. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (c.1150) she presides over the marvelous “insula pomorum,” and her powers reflect this supernatural locale. But by the time of Chrétien's *Erec* (c.1170), Avalon has been normalized as the home of Greslemuef's brother Guingamar, a friend of Morgan. And here, accordingly, in Morgan's first appearance in romance proper, she has been recast as a human woman, the sister of Arthur capable of concocting magical ointments. But here, too, for the first time in our extant sources, she is called “Morgant la fee,” suggesting that even as early as the 1170s she already has an established reputation as a fairy in the actual world, or in other fictional worlds, beyond the text-world of Chrétien's romance. Why Chrétien chose to humanize Morgan is difficult to say. There is too little evidence to support any solid claims about the way Morgan's character had developed in Chrétien's imaginative network up to that point. But what Chrétien's treatment does show is the need for romance authors to make Morgan human in order to integrate her fully into the romance's human world and make her a more dynamic and active member of the

Arthurian court. As a result, therefore, even in her first appearance in romance, her identifying title does not fit her human nature.

Such rationalizations of these humanized fairy characters, furthermore, rely on certain intra-generic expectations as to the essential qualities fairies possess, and locating these will be of some use in determining what exactly a fairy is, and (perhaps more importantly for considering their function within romance) how these ontological distinctions facilitate and reward the particular utilizations of fairies within romance. The most obvious of these qualities is power—the power to perform marvels, to create illusions, to heal, and to otherwise perform deeds beyond the limits of normal human agency. Human characters skilled in magic retain much of this power, but by being human, this power has its limits. Malory can have his Morgan take Arthur away on a boat to be healed, but in the end, because Malory's Morgan is merely human, and because his Avalon is not an alternative world within the romance's text-world, she cannot save him. In the same sense the author of the prose *Lancelot* can have his Lady of the Lake create an illusory lake, but, because she is not really a “merfeine,” her marvelous deeds can only be magical imitations of Otherworldly feats. Such bounds are not restrictive, however, when romance authors make these characters fully fairy, that is, when they create alternative worlds distinct from the human worlds in their texts. The Morgan of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, for example, can sustain Arthur unendingly on the Island of Apples, just as the Lady of the Lake in Ulrich's *Lanzelet* really can ride on the mist from the sea when she comes to take the infant Lancelot away to her supernatural realm.

For fairies this power is almost always coupled with beauty, a quality that is carried over to rationalized fairies as well, but only to an extent. The author of the English prose *Merlin*, for example, describes Morgan as a young woman who is certainly attractive, but hardly a paragon of beauty:

Morgain was a yonge damesell, fressh and jolye. But she was somewhat brown of visage and sangwein colour, and nother to fatte ne to lene, but was full apert, avenaunt, and comely, streight and right plesaunt.⁸

Similarly, the author of the prose *Lancelot* makes his Lady of the Lake beautiful, but it is only on account of her powers of “paroles et des pieres et des herbes” that she can maintain her youth and beauty. This demonstrates how clever this Lady of the Lake can be, but through the process, also how

ephemeral or artificially contrived such qualities are in these humanized fairy characters. For most fairies though, their beauty, like their power, is unparalleled, and it is a beauty that, being an intrinsic part of their Otherworldly nature, does not fade with time. Walter Map (c.1200–10) tells of Eadric Wild, a knight who, encountering a group of dancing fairy women one night, became enraptured by their beauty and took one as his wife. The fame of this fairy bride spread wide, and when William the Conqueror heard of the prodigy he requested to see her in person to prove if it was true. The couple then went to London and was presented before the King, where, on account of the fairy's beauty, all was confirmed. As Map relates:

Maximum erat fatalitatis argumentum inuisa prius et inaudita species mulieris.

[A great proof of her fairy nature was the beauty of the woman, the like of which had never been seen or heard of.]⁹

As in this account, a fairy's beauty in romance is an essential and defining characteristic. This is well known in the fairy mistress romances, typified in Marie de France's *Lanval* and its Middle English re-workings, where authors can use a fairy mistress's beauty to emphasize their role as vehicles for wish-fulfillment. The ability to heal and bestow great wealth aside, such fairies provide the potential for, and more often than not the attainment of, ultimate sexual fulfillment. This, it seems, is as would be expected, but a fairy's inherent beauty transcends just the fairy mistress motif. Fairies, both male as well as female, who fulfill other roles in romance (and often much more sinister roles), are likewise beautiful, though often not to the extent of fairy mistresses. The dangerous supernatural knight in the late-twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Amadas et Ydoine* is richly dressed and "beautiful and noble" (*bel et bien*, 5655), as is the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, whose splendour is described in a passage spanning over eighty lines, just before his proposal for the beheading game (136–221).¹⁰ Likewise, the "fairi knyȝte" in the fourteenth-century Middle English *Sir Degararé*, who rapes a maiden and years later reappears to do battle with his own son, is a "Gentil, ȝong and jolif man" (91) whose "visage was feir" (93) and whose "bodi ech weies / Of countenaunce riȝt curteis" (93–94). Even more beautiful than these, however, is the Fairy King and his attendants in *Sir Orfeo*. As Heurodis says: "Y no seiȝe neuer ȝete before / So fair creatours y-core" (147–48).¹¹

These fairies, with their penchant for abduction and their association with a collection of mangled and tortured bodies, are paradoxes of signification—they are terrible beauties—and as such their presence breaks down the traditional association between benevolence and beauty most commonly found in the human worlds of romance. Humanized fairies, likewise, often adopt this paradox. Morgan, in the English prose *Merlin*, is both physically “plesaunt” and “evell for to acorde,” and in nearly every instance Morgan’s increased malevolence parallels her humanity, though authors rarely relied upon her physical appearance to signify this maliciousness.¹²

But unlike humans, fairies are hardly ever “evil”; even when they are associated with incubi they are more “neutral” than demonic, and in romance they rarely incur judgement from their narrators, regardless of how malicious their intent may be. Whereas all humans (even humanized fairies) are subject to the principles and judgements of Christian morality, fairies, within the text-worlds of their romances, are free from the moral scruples humans are expected to abide by and operate within. The theological explanation given for the existence of fairies—that they were the “neutral” angels cast down to the sub-lunar sphere during the war in heaven—seems to have had a substantial, though perhaps indirect, influence on the way romance authors used them in their narratives.¹³ Existing outside the traditional categories the church offered to make sense of the surrounding world, fairies occupied a unique conceptual space that further endorsed the unparalleled freedom with which authors depicted the ambiguous supernatural according to their needs. Far as fairies were from being orthodox, however, it may not be best to describe them as unorthodox either. As recorded and discussed in nonfictional texts, most notably in chronicles, fairies were generally credited as existing in the natural order, but such authorization was allowed precisely because they fit outside any censoring, licensing, or regulating system. In this sense fairies existed in a “state of exception” outside orthodoxy without also being strictly unorthodox. That is, they existed outside the established order of traditional customs, practices, and power relations, and therefore stood in a position to be used to reflect and question those establishments, but they did so without contradicting, or even directly opposing, such orthodoxies: they were *adoxic*.¹⁴

This adoxic positioning, reflected in a narrative “state of exception” within romance texts, allowed for the exemption of fairies, not only from any social or moral structures established in the human worlds of their texts, but also from those worlds’ logical and physical laws. And this characteristic leads to another essential quality fairies exhibit: a certain indomitable nature based on their ultimate autonomy from the human worlds they intrude upon. Whereas romance authors depict all human characters (even humanized fairies) as in some sense fallible and vulnerable, they represent fairies as transcending even the possibility of such shortcomings. Nor are fairies susceptible to the tide of human events; authors may have them intervene in human affairs, and even place them in unions with human characters, such as the fairy mistress in Marie de France’s *Lanval* or Pressine in Jean d’Arras’s *Melusine*, but such relationships are always presented as being initiated entirely at the discretion of the fairy, and the rules of that union are set by the fairy alone. Related to this autonomy, too, is a certain inscrutability. Humans (intra-diegetically, but also omniscient narrators and readers) are rarely, if ever, given access to a fairy’s thoughts or feelings—their motivations or desires.¹⁵ Their interior selves are always hidden, and as a result, the thematic emphasis is always on the development of the human characters they come in contact with, on how their presence affects the human worlds they intrude upon. It is, though, often the case that a fairy’s interior desires are evident externally: because of their extreme power, coupled with their freedom from moral constraints, there is little to stand in the way of their taking what they want.

A fairy’s motivations, however, are more difficult to pin down, and this points to another essential quality fairies commonly possess: their tendency to show up unexpectedly and behave in ways that are neither logical nor predictable. The actions of fairies in romance, as mentioned previously, frequently carry with them a certain arbitrariness, a certain lack of logical motivation—tendencies that make conjectural ventures into the interiority of such fairies, for both the romance hero or heroine and the audience, all the more impossible. The fairy mistress’s sudden appearance to, and favor for, Lanval, for example, is (at a diegetic level) entirely unexpected and arbitrary, and if she has any logical motivation for choosing to bestow her favors on Lanval, it is beyond any knowable rationale. This same sort of illogicality also applies to Pressine, who places on her husband the

injunction that he must not see her in childbed, a taboo that picks up on the ritual uncleanness of women in childbed, but also incorporates immediate and inordinately arbitrary consequences.¹⁶ But this sort of arbitrariness is common among fairies in romance—a quality that is highlighted in the activities of Shakespeare’s fairies in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, as it is in the actions of their predecessors, the King and Queen of “fayerye” in Chaucer’s *Merchant’s Tale*.

Like a fairy’s intrinsic autonomy, such a propensity for arbitrary or illogical behavior is decidedly un-human, and when authors humanize their fairies this quality is nearly always lost. When Morgan is depicted as a human woman her actions are always motivated.¹⁷ In the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* her role is closely related to the Lancelot/Guinevere plot: because of her love for Lancelot and consequent jealousy of his devotion to Guinevere, her activities are continuously aimed at seducing Lancelot and shaming the queen. In the same sense, too, the humanized Lady of the Lake, as the adoptive mother of the foundling Lancelot, is motivated to protect him, and thus both use their magic in opposition to each other, each with only mildly successful results. Writing shortly after the compilation of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, the author of the prose *Tristan* utilizes Morgan’s emerging role in romance to achieve many of the same narrative effects as in the prose *Lancelot*. Characteristic of Morgan’s machinations, in both romances, is the episode in the *Tristan* of the magic drinking horn, from which no unfaithful lady can drink without spilling its contents. Morgan instructs a damsel to take the horn to Arthur’s court in an attempt to catch Guinevere in her adultery, but Lamorat, who bears a grudge against Tristan and Mark, forces the damsel to take it to Mark’s court instead. In the end the test is dismissed, and Lamorat’s intentions are thus thwarted as much as Morgan’s, though the test does provide incentive for further spying on Tristan and Yseut.¹⁸

As this episode demonstrates, once Morgan is humanized her powers become severely limited. Though Morgan really is capable of instilling the horn with magical properties, her plot relies on the agency of other humans, and through such fallible and fickle intermediaries it is foiled almost before it has a chance to begin. Furthermore, this episode also shows why certain romance authors chose to humanize Morgan in order to integrate her into the Arthurian court, to make her actions and motivations logical within texts that do not include alternative worlds. Ultimately, such a move worked

in tandem with her emerging narrato-logical function—to test and challenge Arthur and his court—as well as to provide opportunities for the residual repercussions that often result from such scheming. Such a role is developed early in the French prose romances, and this trend carries over into the later English romances as well. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c.1370–80), the first time the Morgan/Guinevere feud is alluded to in English, Morgan is made fully human, her power coming from knowledge of “clergye” and “craftes” learned through the teachings of Merlin (2447–48). And though the reference to Morgan at the poem’s end does little to explain the nature and actions of the Green Knight, it does explain her relationship with the Arthurian court and her motivations for sending the Green Knight to Camelot—to scare Guinevere to death—as does it provide another example of the way these failed schemes can spin off into new plots and narrative developments.

Roughly a century later Malory carves out a similar role for Morgan in his *Morte Darthur* (c.1470), and though he does include episodes such as the drinking horn gift, he broadens her hostility toward Guinevere to include Arthur and his court generally, a move intended to underscore one of Malory’s most potent themes: the dangers and eventual tragedy of familial and civil strife. This intense hatred is enabled by her humanization. Whereas in treatments of Morgan as a fairy she maintains a fundamental autonomy from the affairs of the world of men and women, within Malory’s text-world she must conform to the rules of the human world from which she originates and in which she dwells. Her actions must be logically motivated; they must be in reaction to the environments in which she is situated, which are, as a consequence of being Arthur’s half-sister, the interworkings of the Arthurian court.¹⁹

There is, however, one episode in the *Morte* in which Morgan’s motivations come into question: when she takes the mortally wounded Arthur to Avalon to care for his wounds. Of course, since Malory makes Morgan human, and since the internal folklore of his text-world does not contain an alternative world, there is not the requisite supernatural agency to heal Arthur, but Morgan’s caring for Arthur in this episode is entirely unmotivated and unexplained in light of the development of her character to that point in the romance. It seems Morgan’s role in Arthur’s voyage to Avalon was too fundamental to her intertextual existence for Malory to drop altogether, built up through more than 300 years of narrative expectations

(both as a fairy and a human) from the *Vita Merlini* onward. This seemingly unmotivated and illogical behavior, however, is rare for humanized fairies, and it shows, not necessarily Morgan acting more like a fairy, but rather Malory not entirely willing to completely divorce his humanized treatment of Morgan from her longstanding role in narrative tradition. Malory's Morgan may be fully human, but she is still "le Fay" both in name and intertextual association, and, like all such humanized fairies, though the efficacy of her marvelous abilities is necessarily lessened, she still fulfills many of the same narrative functions as her fairy antecedents. Within the text-world of the *Morte Darthur*, therefore, she cannot be fully divorced from her narrative origins as a fairy.

This is not to imply, though, that Morgan's degeneration from fairy to human was a straightforward chronological process. Malory did not inherit Morgan from a tradition that saw her consistently humanized, nor was his treatment of her by any means a cumulative end to any such humanizing process. As we have already seen, Morgan was being humanized as early as Chrétien's *Erec*, as she was in Hartmann von Aue's later adaptation (c.1205), though the Middle High German version greatly increases her magical abilities.²⁰ Only a couple of years before Chrétien's *Erec*, however, Etienne de Rouen casts Morgan as fully supernatural in his *Draco Normannicus* (c.1167–70), depicting her as an ever-living nymph (*nympha perennis*) who successfully restores Arthur in Avalon, makes him immortal, and establishes him as the leader of a fairy legion (*fatata cohors*).²¹ Likewise, in two thirteenth-century manuscripts of Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* (c.1160–65), Morgan appears as fully fairy, though, of course, in this text she is not associated with the Arthurian tradition: she is the mistress of Hector (8023–30).²² The mention of Morgan in this brief passage can most likely be attributed to scribal interpolation, but if so, it is a telling one. Of the eighteen manuscripts consulted by Constans, fourteen different names are given to Hector's fairy mistress, with the most common being "Orva la fee," or some like variation.²³ Such disparity is likely due to the fact that Orva is a name unattested elsewhere, and by making Hector's fairy lover "Morgain la fee," the thirteenth-century scribes could solidify this fairy mistress by tapping into her existence in romance and legend beyond the text, or, more simply, could just be substituting a known fairy for an unknown one. In either case, associating Hector with Morgan lends the hero a certain cachet in the imaginative

network in which Morgan was known, and it does so, despite the *Roman de Troie* being a non-Arthurian text, without jeopardizing the internal logic of his narrative—while the romance can pick up associations and reverberations intertextually, its text-world ultimately exists independent of anything beyond it.

If, however, these scribes were among the first to appropriate Morgan as a fairy mistress in a non-Arthurian text, they were not the last. At about the same time the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* was being compiled, the author of *Huon de Bordeaux* borrows Morgan from Arthurian tradition and casts her as a “fee,” the mother of Auberon and the lover of his father, Julius Caesar (6–18).²⁴ Following these romances, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries then saw the height of Morgan’s humanization in the Arthurian tradition, especially in the English reworkings of the French vulgate material. Following the *Mort Artu*, authors of both the English alliterative *Morte Arthure* (c.1399–1402) and the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (c.1400) humanize Morgan, and in the fifteenth century Malory follows suit, as we have already seen, in his *Morte*. But by 1498, just thirteen years after Caxton’s printing of Malory, a prose version of *Ogier le Dannois* is printed in Paris, a romance in which the author again removes Morgan from her Arthurian context and recasts her as a powerful fairy mistress who appears at Ogier’s birth to dower him with gifts. She then reappears later in his life to take him to Avalon, illustrating how Morgan’s fairy status allows for the reappropriation of her supernatural realm.²⁵ Likewise, 1534 saw the printing of John Bouchier’s widely popular prose translation of *Huon de Bordeaux*, bringing Morgan, as fully fairy, and in a non-Arthurian text, into the limelight for an increasingly English-only reading audience.²⁶

However, surveying these depictions chronologically, or, indeed, placing too strong an emphasis on intertextual dependence, may not be the best method for making sense of Morgan’s movement across Arthurian and non-Arthurian texts, as well as her vacillation between human and fairy. This sixteenth-century surge in representing Morgan as fully fairy is probably the result, not necessarily of a widespread reimagining of Morgan across romance text-worlds, but rather of the revival of the French romance heroes Ogier and Huon, to whom Morgan, as fully fairy, had been attached within the internal folklore of their specific romance’s text-worlds centuries before. The earliest evidence for Ogier’s association with Morgan comes

from the fourteenth-century romance *Brun de la Montaigne*, which mentions Ogier as the lover of Morgan (*Morgue l'amie Ogier*, 3399).²⁷

Unfortunately such a brief reference leaves more questions than answers, for if the author of *Brun de la Montaigne* had a source for associating Ogier with Morgan, it has not survived. Neither Raimbert de Paris's twelfth-century *La Chevalerie Ogier* nor its late-thirteenth-century redaction *Les Enfances Ogier* by Adenet le Roi makes any mention of Ogier's relationship with Morgan. But, of course, the author of *Brun de la Montaigne*, as with the authors (and scribes) of the non-Arthurian texts mentioned previously, need not have had a source. Ogier's association with the fully fairy Morgan is a fictional construct operating within the internal folklore of the romance's text-world, and as such, it holds the freedom to operate independently of Raimbert de Paris's and Adenet le Roi's treatments of the same figure. The result of this *poiesis*, though, is that by the fourteenth century, if not some time before, Morgan was associated with the adventures of Ogier. This connection was maintained into the mid-sixteenth century in French, and by the late sixteenth century had made its way into English with *Mervine Son of Ogier*, a romance whose author likewise makes Morgan fully fairy, the wife of Ogier and mother of Mervine.²⁸ Likewise, John Bouchier, in playing with the text of his French original, conceives Morgan, not as the mother of Oberon (his mother here is the "lady of the pryuey Isle"), but as the lover of Ogier, and also as the sister of Arthur and mother of Merlin.²⁹ In doing so, he (quite originally) incorporates three romance heroes (Huon, Arthur, and Ogier) from three different traditions into a single text-world, showing how the stories of these three heroes bear a certain intertextual relationship based on their previous associations with Morgan, and how the portrayals of Morgan in these romances complement each other and facilitate this intersection. It is a strategy Bouchier uses to highlight his hero's greatness, comparing him favorably to Arthur (and also implicitly to Ogier) as the knight chosen to succeed Oberon as the ruler of the fairy realm. As Oberon, on his deathbed, says to the assembled company:

I wyll not leue you without a lorde but fyrst in my lyfe dayes I wyll purvey you of one, who shall be duke Huon, whome I loue well and derely . . . kynge Arthur hath sore pressed on me to haue my dignyte & realme, but I wyll that none shal haue it but alonly Huon of Burdeaux. (601)

Arthur, of course, is angered by this, and threatens war. But Oberon will have none of it, saying to Arthur:

Syr, I wyll ye holde your peas, for if ye speke one worde more agaynst Huon the souerayne kyng of the fayry, that he wolde condempne hym parpetually to be a warwolfe in the se, and there to end his dayes in payne and mysery. (603)

To this threat of supernatural punishment, Arthur can do nothing but yield, and he, thus being subordinate to this new king of the fairy realm, begs Huon's forgiveness.

In addition to emphasizing Huon's greatness, moreover, Bouchier's appropriation of the staple Arthurian figures allowed him to reimagine (at a time when the Arthurian tradition was making a humanized Morgan the norm) these characters within the text-world of his romance with more emphasis on the fully supernatural, and in so doing, to highlight the more overtly fantastic career of his romance's hero—a strategy similarly used by the author of *Ogier le Dannois*. At Ogier's birth, six fairies appear to give him various gifts, though Morgan, the last, endows him with the most significant gift of all: the fate that after a long life filled with heroic deeds he shall return to her in Avalon as her lover. Huon, too, is similarly favored by fairies, and when Charlemagne sends Huon on a quest that should end his life, Oberon comes to his aid. And as with Ogier, Huon is taken to the fairy realm at the end of his career, where Morgan, as a figure intertextually associated with such realms, is there to greet him, illustrating how Morgan's vacillation between human and fairy is more a product of *poiesis*—of authorial needs across various plot strains—than any all-encompassing evolution (or de-evolution) of her character.

The Best of Both Worlds: Between Fairies and Humans within Romance

Fairy figures such as Morgan may alternate between human and fairy both across and within narrative traditions, fulfilling various roles in the ebb and flow of authorial needs and audience expectations as romance developed from the twelfth into the sixteenth century, but there are certain cases, too, in which authors may play with this sort of vacillation within the text-worlds of individual romances. The fifteenth-century *Partonope of Blois*, an expanded translation of a twelfth-century French original, is a romance of

this sort.³⁰ For the first half of the romance the author presents the heroine, Melior, as a fully mysterious woman with all the trappings of a fairy mistress: beauty, autonomy, inscrutability, and supernatural powers. Her favor for Partonope leads her to arrange for him a series of marvelous adventures, including a journey on a mysterious unmanned boat, through which he eventually ends up (as a knight chosen by a fairy mistress usually does) in her bed.³¹ During this meeting Partonope falls in love, and after making love, Melior places on him the taboo that he should not have sight of her for two and a half years (their meeting has taken place in complete darkness) and warns him of the fatal consequences should he break her prohibition: she will be shamed and Partonope will lose his life. In return for his obedience, though, she promises he will live in luxury and all his desires will be fulfilled.

To this point in the romance the author constructs Melior's character according to the conventions of a fairy mistress as understood within the imaginative network in which this romance participates.³² Her mysteriousness and marvelous powers aside, the great wealth she bestows on Partonope is accompanied by the imposition of a taboo that carries with it all the arbitrariness characteristic of fairy mistresses. It is, diegetically, a test for the sake of a test, without any evident logic behind it, and its imposition reflects not only Melior's seemingly illogical behavior, but also her imperious nature. In the second half of the romance, though, these qualities that should mark her as a fairy mistress quickly disintegrate. Partonope swears to obey her injunction, but he cannot live up to his promise. With the aid of a magic lantern Partonope casts aside the covers one night to reveal

þe ffeyreste shape creature

That euer was formed þorowe nature. (5864–65)

The consequences of this betrayal, though, are not as dire (at least for Partonope) as Melior had warned. Partonope does not die. Instead, Melior swoons, and upon awaking, she bewails his “grette folye.” She explains that as a young girl she was sent to a school where she learned the powers of “erbe” and “spyces,” and by age fifteen, became a master of “Nygromancy” and “the vij. artys” (5933–35). It emerges, too, that she is also the Queen of Byzantium, a fittingly Eastern provenance for a human enchantress.³³

Because Partonope violates the conditions of her taboo, however, she is bereft of all her “connynge” and “crafte” (5976–77). She has been rationalized as human—a rationalization that comes concurrently with the loss of those powers that associated her with fairy. Much like in *Melusine*, the male gaze here brings about a loss of female power, and as such *Partonope* might be said to rework the Cupid and Psyche myth according to romance conventions, as Melior’s emergent identity replaces mysterious “connynge” with vulnerability.³⁴ Now, indeed, she is depicted as merely a young girl in love, without even the control over whom she marries, and it is these concerns, with all the expected attention to the interiority of Melior’s plight, to which the author turns. Along with the loss of Melior’s mysteriousness, magic and the supernatural have nothing to do with the reconciliation of the lovers that concludes the story. Following social conventions and romance norms a tournament is held to determine who will take Melior’s hand in marriage, a right that Partonope wins through victory. And as the romance’s conclusion demonstrates, this abrupt rationalization of Melior’s character results in a shift in narrative emphasis. It is not Melior who comes to save Partonope from the predicament he has caused for himself, but rather Partonope who must rescue Melior and save their love through strength of arms.³⁵ As a result of such maneuvering, then, the author can get the best of both the human and the fairy worlds. Making Melior human allows the author to focus on the hero’s adventures at war and in the tournament arena—on that sort of chivalric action that so often preoccupies romance narrative. But by holding off on making a firm statement about Melior’s supernatural status, and therefore by generating ambiguity and indeterminacy within the text through allowing for the possibility of an alternative world within the romance’s text-world, the author is able to add supernatural suspense to the narrative and imaginative depth to Melior’s character. This mystery and suspense holds significant thematic and narratological significance in terms of *Partonope*’s development, and I will return to it.

A romance with a similar narrative outline is the late-fifteenth-century *Eger and Grime*.³⁶ Structurally, the author patterns the romance into two near-symmetrical halves, designated by Caldwell as the “Adventures of Eger” and the “Adventures of Grime” respectively, with the latter mirroring, and in turn correcting, the trauma of the former. But the major conceptual shift between the two halves lies in the presentation of the supernatural (or

quasi-supernatural) “Forbidden Land,” and in this the presentation of the quasi-fairy mistress Loospaine resembles that of Melior in *Partonope*. Wounded to the verge of death after his battle with the mysterious Sir Gray Steel, Eger, in the first half of the romance, eventually finds himself at the bower of Loospaine, a woman whose “rud was red as rose in raine”—the most beautiful woman in the world (217–18). She cares for his wounds, but the silk tents do not stop the blood, nor do the “spices & salues” ease his pain, so Loospaine gives him a marvelous elixir. As Eger explains to Grime:

the drinke shee gaue mee was grasse greene;
soone in my wounds itt was seene;
the blood was away, the drinke was there,
& all was soft that erst was sore. (291–94)

With this marvelous healing aid, however, comes a taboo:

froe that loue make you once agast,
your oyntments may noe longer last. (405–406)

The favors of a fairy mistress often carry with them an injunction of absolute fidelity to the fairy herself, but in this case the author makes the conditions of Loospaine’s taboo relative to Eger’s devotion to his original beloved, Winglayne—a reversal necessary for the author to make since Loospaine’s eventual lover in the romance (though she does not know it at this point in the narrative) is Grime, not Eger.³⁷ As with all taboos in romance, though, the hero cannot uphold his end of the bargain, and when he gets within a mile from home all his wounds reopen in agonizing pain, suggesting the extent to which the rules of Loospaine’s world appear to be different from those of Eger’s.

These differences are those that distinguish the human world from the Otherworld, and in the first half of the romance the author introduces Loospaine with many of the qualities common among fairy mistresses. Aside from great beauty and the marvelous powers at her disposal, her mysteriousness suggests a certain unknowability. She is imperious and inscrutable, and her actions, no less than her presence alone, work to give her the air of a fully supernatural woman. However, in the second half of the romance, the “Adventures of Grime,” all of these fairy-like qualities are

rationalized. When Grime rides into the Forbidden Land to avenge Eger's loss he meets a squire who informs him that Loospaine is the daughter of Erle Gares, the Lord of the country, and that she had wedded Sir Attelston but, before the union could be consummated, he was slain at the hands of Sir Gray Steel. These social relations are the first indication that Loospaine may not be the fairy mistress she initially appeared to be. As evinced in the treatments of Morgan discussed earlier, it is often the case that the integration of fairies into social networks runs parallel with their humanization. And what's more, no self-respecting fairy would ever allow her lover to be slain at the hands of another knight, even a supernatural one. These suspicions, moreover, are later confirmed when Grime visits Loospaine's bower, where, after playing a dirge, she begins to weep, saying:

I must neuer be weele
Till I be auenged on Sir Gray Steele,
For he slew my brother, my fathers heyre,
& alsoe my owne Lord both fresh & fayre. (863–66)

This lament is distinctly un-fairy. Not only is it an expression of the sort of interior thoughts and feelings typically inaccessible in fairy figures, but it is also a cry for help, for revenge—something no fairy would ever need. In the end Grime avenges Loospaine and kills Sir Gray Steel, and in so doing, wins the appreciation of Loospaine's father, who gives Grime Loospaine's hand in marriage. Like Melior, she does not even have a say in who she marries, and also like Melior, she spends the second half of the romance completely humanized, lacking not only the mysteriousness she once had, but also, apparently, the supernatural agency to perform any marvelous deeds. Unlike Melior, though, and unlike many humanized fairies, such as Morgan and the Lady of the Lake, the powers that she does have in the first half of the romance are never explained through learning in nigromancy or the seven arts, and thus Loospaine, with all her conflicting associations, emerges as something of an ambiguous figure—neither clearly fairy nor human—whose ultimate indeterminacy works to create an uncanny aesthetic that builds on various other *unheimliche* episodes scattered throughout the romance (more on this later).³⁸

There are other romance authors who similarly depict fairy-like figures with this sort of ambiguity. Marie de France, for example, presents the heroine of her *Guigemar* as in many ways fully human, but she also has

certain supernatural associations. Akin to the adventures of Partonope, Guigemar is brought to the heroine by a mysterious unmanned boat he comes across while hunting (after first encountering a speaking hind), but in this case she did not arrange the hind or the boat. She does, though, tie a knot in his shirt that only she can untie. The hind and the boat may be a happy coincidence (though it seems unlikely), but how is it she can tie this supernatural knot?³⁹ There are no rational explanations offered. Similarly, in the fifteenth-century *Generides*, the daughter of the King of Surre falls in love with the eponymous hero when, lost during the course of a hunt, he arrives at her brilliant forest palace. Generides, though, has to leave, but before he departs she weeps—the tears soaking his shirt and leaving a mark only she can wash out (605–15).⁴⁰ Again, the information the author gives of her familial relations, coupled with her open weeping when her lover departs, suggest she is very much human, but then why is she alone in a secluded castle? And why, moreover, do her tears hold such supernatural properties?

Perhaps a useful way to conceptualize these ambiguities or apparent incongruities in *Generides*, *Eger and Grime* and *Guigemar* is to say that the internal folklores of these romances—the rules that govern the text-worlds of their narratives—are never fully developed by the authors, creating an effect that leaves the audience unsure as to *what* certain characters really are, and ultimately, as to how certain events ought to be interpreted. This incompleteness, this refusal to establish an internal coherence for a narrative's text-world, is related to what Dolezel calls “saturation”—the degree to which an author constructs the world of a fictional text.⁴¹ The variable saturation of a text-world is determined by a combination of explicit and implicit fictional facts given by the author: the more fictional facts given or insinuated, the higher degree of saturation.⁴² What remains, then, are gaps, the manifestation of what Pavel calls the “unavoidable incompleteness” of fictional worlds, which the audience attempts to complete, or “fill,” based on knowledge of worlds beyond the text.⁴³ This, of course, is a process of subjective construction, but not entirely. In asserting the influence of the text over the act of interpretation, Wolfgang Iser says that the “process of assembling the meaning of the text is not a private one, for although it does mobilize the subjective disposition of the

reader, it does not lead to daydreaming but to the fulfilment of conditions that have already been structured in the text.”⁴⁴

Added to these intra-text conditions, too, both in terms of filling the gaps in the world of a fictional text and in constructing implicit facts given by the author, are other texts (especially of the same genre) existing within the audience’s imaginative network.⁴⁵ Due to such a reliance on intertextuality—on the “parasitical” nature of fictional worlds—the audience can assume, for instance, that Melior or Loospaine may be fairy mistresses, and can operate under those assumptions until the author presents a fictional fact to the contrary. But what happens (as indeed it does with Loospaine) when no such fictional facts are explicitly given, and when contradictory facts are implicitly given? Iser argues that texts containing figures and events that are capable of convening multiple possible meanings are characterized by overdetermination, a quality of a text that produces indeterminacy and, in turn, “sets in motion a whole process of comprehension” whereby the reader tries to assemble the logic of a text-world.⁴⁶ However, in this model, romances such as *Eger and Grime*, *Generides*, and *Guigemar* are overdetermined to the point that their indeterminacies cannot be resolved, and audiences are not able to fully assemble the logic of the text-worlds because they have no way of definitively resolving the complications or inconsistencies the texts present. But ultimately, romances such as these—romances without a complete internal folklore, or indeed, without an identifiable internal folklore at all—thrive on this sort of functional irresolvability, since romance authors can use such openness to provoke wonder and encourage speculation, ultimately pushing the audience to imaginative engagement.⁴⁷

Chrétien’s *Yvain*, as with its later English version *Iwain and Gawain*, is another romance in which the author does not construct a coherent or complete internal folklore. When Yvain kills Esclados the Red at the marvelous fountain he immediately weds Laudine, Esclados’s widow. Here Laudine is introduced as a fully human woman, a humanity she maintains throughout the romance, save for her associations with the marvelous fountain and her possession of a supernatural talisman she gives to Yvain when he must leave. Accompanying this talisman, though, is the injunction that he will lose her love unless he returns to her within a year, a prohibition—with its seemingly arbitrary strictures and inordinate consequences—that

is more reminiscent of a fairy taboo than any human agreement.⁴⁸ The explanation critics have commonly given for these seemingly incongruent qualities in Laudine's character is that she, in more "primitive" tales, was originally a *fée*, and through the course of transmission became humanized, though without fully losing all her fairy resonances.⁴⁹ Such an explanation illustrates how audiences, when confronted with a romance with an incoherent or incomplete internal folklore, must look beyond the text-world of the romance to fill the gaps left by the author. This, of course, is a natural phenomenological process, but in this case it is one too determined by speculations of possible worlds beyond the text, and does not account for the dynamics of *poiesis*—of authorial invention and play—of which Chrétien was fully capable. Of course it remains possible that these fairy-like shadings in human characters may be (at least partially) the result of a rationalizing process across time and retellings, but it seems unlikely that such a lack of a coherent internal folklore would have gone unnoticed by authors such as Chrétien or Marie de France, or any competent author. Indeed, in this respect, it may be more productive to consider such irresolvability as an authorial strategy intended not only to create complex situations in which a knight could receive the benefits of a supernatural woman and yet still be integrated into the courtly networks of the human world, but also (more generally, and perhaps more fundamentally) to add imaginative depth, a certain aesthetic of mystery, to the narrative.⁵⁰

If, though, human characters can reveal shadings of fairy characteristics within a romance, the opposite can also happen. The author of *Claris et Laris* (c.1270), who rewrites the Val sans Retour episode of the prose *Lancelot*, depicts Morgan as the queen of the fairies, the ruler over the Otherworldly Brocéliande. Since the author of the prose *Lancelot* humanizes Morgan, her Val sans Retour has the appearance of being an Otherworldly paradise, but, like the Lady of the Lake's domain, it is merely an enchantment—an illusion of an Otherworldly realm. Knights may be trapped therein, but Lancelot need only use his ordinary human powers to break the spell. In *Claris et Laris*, though, since Morgan is fully supernatural, so too is her realm of entrapment (from which human knights cannot escape without supernatural intervention). When the two friends Claris and Laris adventure into Brocéliande they are greeted by Morgan, who informs them that they should be richly treated and entertained for the remainder of their lives, but also that they should never be able to leave her

realm. The news is not especially welcomed by the two friends, especially Claris, who had left his beloved behind. The next morning, however, Laris meets Madoine, a fairy in Morgan's company who falls deeply in love with him. She offers her love to Laris and he accepts on the condition that she shows him how to escape Morgan's entrapment—a demand to which, in a reversal of fairy norms, she consents.

It is not unusual that an author would have a fairy mistress appear to the man she favors, or that the fairy would offer her love to him, but the reversal is that in this romance it is the human who sets the conditions of the relationship. Furthermore, after gleaning the necessary information, Laris, with his friend, makes his escape without regard for Madoine or the agreement they made. He has taken advantage of her, and it seems she is incapable of doing anything about it. Later in the romance, while Claris and Laris are asleep, Madoine and two other fairies abduct Laris and take him away to their castle. When Laris awakes he reprimands Madoine for her actions, but she replies by saying he should not blame her, but “Amor” instead (8229).⁵¹ Finally Claris manages to sneak into the castle and free Laris, at which point the two continue on their adventures, unhindered by Madoine, who, it seems, through the course of the romance, has lost all the trappings of an Otherworldly being. She is neither autonomous nor, as a result, overly powerful; she behaves as any young woman in love, capable of being betrayed by her *amie*, and in the end, in her failed attempt to get her beloved back, she cannot even take responsibility for her own actions—she is under the control of personified Love, a far cry from the imperiousness and inscrutability a fairy would be expected to exhibit. This sort of incoherence in a romance's internal folklore is, however, rather exceptional. A fairy who does not behave like a fairy is, as a narrative device, somewhat self-defeating, and this sort of authorial strategy did not catch on. It was far more popular, as we have seen, for the opposite to happen, for humans to take on fairy characteristics, through which authors could take advantage of much of the mysteriousness and allure of the Otherworld while also allowing for the fuller psychological and interpersonal development of these figures as they become, like Morgan le Fay, integrated into the human worlds in which they are inherently invested.

This interplay between human and fairy characteristics is manifested further in the characters who are the offspring of human/fairy miscegenation, an intermingling that provided romance authors additional

avenues through which they could take advantage of the best qualities of both the human and fairy worlds. Melusine, the daughter of Pressine and Elynas, is a prime example of this sort of figure.⁵² When Elynas breaks Pressine's taboo of seeing her in childbed, she disappears with their three daughters to Avalon, the "yle lost," but when the daughters learn of their father's betrayal, they imprison him in a mountain. Pressine, angered by this, locks two of them away, but the eldest and most at fault, Melusine, is beset with a curse that she must turn into a serpent from the waist down every Saturday. If she marries, she will live (and die) as a "naturel & humayn woman" (15), but if her husband sees her in serpent form, she will lose her fully human nature and return to her punishment until the day of judgement. Eventually Melusine marries Raymondin, though on the condition that he never attempts to see her on Saturdays. The injunction has all the air of an illogical fairy taboo, but there is nothing arbitrary about it, as it is directly related to the conditions of Pressine's curse. Nor does it work as would be expected. Raymondin (of course) breaks the taboo, but it is not until later, when he berates her as a "fals serpent," that she changes form and flies away. In the end the author has Pressine's curse fulfilled, but there is some slippage in the way he has the condition of Melusine's taboo carried out.⁵³

By making Melusine half-fairy/half-human, the author has access to the best qualities of both. That is, as half-fairy Melusine can be used to generate a wondrous and mysterious aesthetic within the text, while also providing a supernatural foundation for the house of Lusignan, but at the same time, as half human, she can be treated with all the subtlety and psychological depth of an ordinary woman who has been tragically cursed and subsequently betrayed. There was, however, no standard treatment for human/fairy offspring, both within or across text-worlds. The fairy gene, it seems, was not always as dominant as it was for Melusine, but using modern conceptions of genetics may not be very helpful in thinking about the ways authors had their fairies pass on supernatural attributes to their children. The ten sons Melusine conceives with Raymondin, for example, would each technically be one-quarter fairy, but while eight are born with a unique "birthmark" to signify their supernatural lineage, some of these marks are more pronounced than others, and for some children, this "birthmark" is more than just skin-deep. Melusine's first child, Urian, for example, is born with exceptionally large ears, and with one eye blue, the other red, but

otherwise he is exceptionally beautiful and fair of body, and the romance goes on to recount a number of his heroic deeds without any indication of supernatural abilities. On the other hand, Melusine's tenth son, aptly named Horryble, is born with three eyes, one in the middle of his forehead, and he is "so euyl & so cruel that at the foureth yere of his age he slew two of hys nourryces."⁵⁴ This infantile brutality suggests he inherited more Otherworldly qualities than just a superficial "mark," and also that, when considered in relation to his brothers, or, indeed, to other fairy/human children across romance text-worlds, the qualities engendered on these quarter-fairy figures has more to do with the unique internal folklore of the romance developed according to the needs of the author (in this case to manifest physically the indelible affects Melusine has on Raymondin's line, both for good and ill) than any overarching conception of the ways fairies endow their children with supernatural abilities.⁵⁵

Some authors, however, depict the offspring of fairy/human relations without any indication of their supernatural parentage whatsoever. The author of *Le Bel Inconnu*, for example, makes Guinglain (the Fair Unknown in the romance) the son of Gawain and the fairy Blanchemal. Throughout the romance he shows no signs of any fairy-like characteristics, and his fairy mother seems to be used only as a way to account for his foundling origins.⁵⁶ However, if half-fairy children could betray no supernatural qualities, the opposite was also possible. John Bouchier, as mentioned previously, makes his Oberon in *Huon of Burdeux* the son of Julius Caesar and a fairy lady of the "pryuey Isle." However, despite being half-human, he behaves as fully fairy throughout the romance, and, being introduced as the "kyng of the fayrey," it would be rather easy to forget his half-human nature were it not for his death at the end. These last two examples, however, are somewhat unusual, as romance authors tended to take advantage of the narrative and imaginative possibilities inherent in human/fairy parentage and their offspring. The author of *Sir Degarré*, for example, makes his eponymous hero the son of a woman who had been raped by a "fairi knyȝte," and while Degarré is depicted as any human knight (from his humble beginnings to his rise in the chivalric world), his inherent abilities derived from his fairy parentage play an important role in the narrative. As he grows as a knight and as a man he learns he is of such marvelous prowess (in his first adventure "child Degarré" slays a dragon with only a sapling for a sword, 335–84) that he can only be matched by his

fairy father—a confrontation that concludes the romance and brings about the fulfillment of Degarré's ultimate quest (common among all Fair Unknowns) for self-knowledge and lineal identification.

The Ambiguous Supernatural: Problems of Definition and Classification

As with all fairy-like figures, these half-human/half-fairy characters may be most interesting when, like Melusine or Degarré, they occupy the boundary between human and fairy, carrying with them the characteristics of both worlds, but perhaps even more interesting are those characters who are not human, but who are not explicitly fairies either. There are some figures, found in romance as well as chronicles and legendaries, who appear to be fully Otherworldly, but whose origins are much more ambiguous. Robert Bartlett classifies such beings as “neither angelic, human, nor animal,” creating an umbrella category for the ambiguous supernatural to encompass all creatures existing outside Christian “orthodox” ontologies.⁵⁷ In a world that allowed for marvels such as aquatic men, aerial mariners riding through the clouds in ships, or marching black knights emerging out of mysterious castles, the ambiguous supernatural could be encountered at large in the wide world of nature, just as romance heroes could, at any turn, come across giants, dragons, or marvelous beasts.⁵⁸ But though creatures such as these are clearly supernatural, they betray few qualities associated with fairies.

There are other ambiguous figures, however, who behave much more like fairies, and while, at a diegetic level, distinguishing these figures from humans may have been, at times, rather difficult, it was far more difficult to distinguish them from the strictly demonic. Despite Shakespeare's unambiguous portrayal of fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, his Oberon explicitly distances himself from the “damned spirits all,” insisting that he and his kind are “of another sort”—an insistence that indicates a fundamental difference, but also suggests, since it supposes a need to make such a distinction, certain similarities in behavior and appearance.⁵⁹ However similar fairies and demons may appear to be, though, such distinctions were extremely important: while it may be dangerous to encounter a fairy or some fairy-like being, it is far worse to encounter a demon.

In attempting to clear up such ambiguities, medieval historians and romance authors alike had two tools at their disposal: the swearing test and the Eucharist test. These are not necessarily fairy tests, but demon tests, as demons, within the imaginative networks in which these romances and chronicles participated, could never utter the name of God, nor could they withstand the presence of any Christian rituals. In nearly all instances, however, fairies have no problem encountering Christian paraphernalia or swearing in the name of God, and when such ambiguous beings are shown to pass these tests, it is a good sign they may be fairies, or something fairy-like. In the early thirteenth century Gervase of Tilbury tells of creatures the common folk called *follets*, which should be considered demons, except that they are not deterred by holy water or exorcisms. Nor could they cause any real harm, though they were prone to pelting people with stones, sticks, and household utensils.⁶⁰ At roughly the same time Gerald of Wales, in his description of his travels through Pembrokeshire, gives an account of similarly ambiguous beings who were known for causing mischief, but, again, were not susceptible to any sacramental contrivances.⁶¹ Likewise, in the late fourteenth century Thomas Walsingham tells of a little red man (*homunculus rubeus*) who abducts a young boy whom he takes to be tortured and have his brain removed. Initially, his appearance, coupled with his malicious intentions, would appear to cast him as demonic, but in the end (after the boy had been healed and had grown to become a priest) the little red man appears in church during the Elevation of the Host where he preaches (to the priest whom he had previously abducted) about the providence of God—proving himself to be not demonic, but something far more ambiguous.⁶²

Tests of this sort, moreover, worked as well for romance authors as they did for historians. For example, the author of *Partonope*, following his French original, uses his hero's initial trepidation to help clear up the matter of Melior's possible demonic origins. When Partonope first lies down in Melior's bed he is frightened, thinking the marvels he had thus far encountered may be the "pe develles werke" (888), and when Melior lies down beside him he is equally afraid she may be a demonic illusion. But when Melior finally speaks, she greets him in the name of "mayde Mary" (1326), and for this Partonope is very much relieved. As the narrator says:

He wyste welle, wyth-owte lesynge

Hyt was ne deuelle ne no ffynde
For he herde her haue in mynde
Crystes moder, the mayden Mary. (1344–47)

This test is sufficient to prove, contrary to what Partonope's mother and the Bishop of Paris believe, that Melior is not a demon or devil. But beyond this (as in similar tests in the chronicles) it can do little more, and the author leaves Melior's true human nature ambiguous at this stage in the romance.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the *Gawain*-Poet uses the same strategy to prove (eventually) that the Green Knight is not demonic. When Gawain first lays eyes on the green chapel he thinks that there “myȝt aboute mydnyȝt / þe dele his matynnes telle” (2187–88), and shortly after says,

Now I fele hit is þe fende, in my fyue wyttez,
þat hatz stoken me þis steuen to strye me here.⁶³ (2193–94)

But when Gawain arrives at the green chapel the Green Knight greets him in the name of God (“God þe mot loke!” 2239), and when we, with Gawain, learn that Bertilak and the Green Knight are one and the same, it becomes clear that he is not the “fende” Gawain thought him to be, as Bertilak attended the masses regularly performed at his castle. As with other such cases, though, what the Green Knight really *is* remains very much ambiguous. He may be human—simply Bertilak turned green—but he may also be just the opposite. Unlike humanized depictions of Morgan, the Green Knight is not a figure who is fully rationalized for the sake of the romance; his depiction is much more subtle, and much more complex. As so often in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the *Gawain*-Poet is actively engaged in tweaking conventions and turning motifs on their head. He first introduces the Green Knight as possibly human (“mon most I algate mynn hym to bene,” 141), but as the romance develops it turns out the Green Knight may be a fairy after all, and at the poem's end these tensions are brought to a head. After the final beheading scene the Green Knight claims he was sent to Arthur's court by Morgan, an admission that suggests he is only a human turned green through enchantment. Even this, however, does not satisfactorily clear up the matter, for when we last see the Green Knight, riding off “whiderwarde-soeuer he wolde” (2478), still green, and with all the autonomy and mystery of a fully supernatural being, his true nature again becomes ambiguous.

In the end, for an author who so often explains symbolic meanings (the pentangle, holly bob, green girdle), the *Gawain*-Poet has the imaginative restraint to leave the Green Knight's greenness, and his true nature, open to speculation. As with *Eger and Grime*, Chrétien's *Yvain*, and Marie de France's *Guigemar*, therefore, the *Gawain*-Poet does not construct the internal folklore of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as coherent or complete. Is there an alternative world within the romance, or can all the marvels be attributed to Morgan, existing within the human world? And if there is another possible world within the text, what sort of world is it? What are its rules? The *Gawain*-Poet ultimately leaves these questions unanswered, and in so doing provokes the audience's imaginative engagement by leaving open multiple possible avenues of interpretation. Such overdetermination in the romance is perhaps one of the reasons why critics have tended to look to sources outside the text—namely to Celtic nature myths—in an attempt to explain the presence and nature of the ambiguous supernatural in the romance.⁶⁴ Such theories, however, are not only ultimately inconclusive, since the romance's text-world is not constrained by any supposed sources, but also potentially reductive, since they treat the Green Knight as a cultural or mythical remnant whose origins and meanings must be sourced, rather than as a figure whose meanings and significance are generated by, and convened in, the actions and circumstances of the narrative itself.

At a diegetic level, the author encourages speculation as to the Green Knight's true nature when all of Arthur's courtiers gather around in amazement at first sight of this strange figure:

For vch mon had meruayle quat hit mene myȝt
þat a hapel and a horse myȝt such a hwe lach. (233–34)

This hue is of such strangeness that the courtiers suspect he may be of “fantoum and fayrye” (240), that is, an illusion made by enchantment or subtle arts, but as it turns out, they are wrong.⁶⁵ The Green Knight is not an illusion—he is something far more corporeal, and as Arthur's courtiers quickly discover, something far more threatening.⁶⁶ Later in the romance the *Gawain*-Poet describes him as an “aluisch mon” (681)—a rather telling description, as whether human or supernatural, his behavior throughout the romance is exceptionally fairy-like.

As with many fairies in romance his actions are as illogical as they are inscrutable and unpredictable, and when he bursts into Arthur's court unexpected and unannounced, Arthur's courtiers are as amazed by his physical appearance—his hugeness, his greenness—as they are frightened by his seemingly illogical proposition. His Otherworldly appearance causes them to suspect (rightly) that his violent and seemingly arbitrary beheading game may not be as straightforward as it would be with a human adversary. Eventually, Gawain takes up the challenge, as he does later with Bertilak's "exchange of winnings" game—a game that is no less arbitrary. Why would anyone be interested in instigating this kind of game? And who would be willing to put their wife in such a position for such a cause? Clearly this is outside the scope of Morgan's intent outlined at the romance's end, and if the Green Knight has any sort of personal vendetta against Arthur's round table this would certainly be the wrong way to go about exacting revenge. In fact, regardless of the outcome of this game (as with the beheading game) the Green Knight is set to gain nothing. It is a test for the sake of a test, and this sort of enterprise smacks more of the arbitrary activities of fairies than of any normal human challenge.

Aside from these illogical tendencies, moreover, the Green Knight exhibits a number of other trappings commonly associated with fairies. As noted previously, his Otherworldly splendor is the subject of a lengthy passage in his first scene, and coupled with this opulence is tremendous power—power over Arthur's court, power to survive his own decapitation, and ultimately the power to give and take life. This power, too, includes his ability to see into the heart of Gawain, and at the poem's end, the audience, with Gawain, learns the true nature of the exchange of winnings game: that the Green Knight's concern is with Gawain's moral fiber, his *trouthe*. Like a number of other fairies mentioned earlier, such as Melusine, the fairy mistress in *Lanval*, and Oberon of *Huon of Burdeux*, the Green Knight has that inner sight, and with it, a corresponding concern for those inner things. Through this ability he holds the power, and impetus, to test Gawain in ways that only fairies (or fairy-like figures) can, and through his attention to these moral concerns, coupled with his illogical behavior and exposition of power, he behaves in ways that only fairies know how. This knowledge of the Green Knight's nature, however, comes late in the narrative, and in holding off in providing what information he does give, the *Gawain*-Poet can build up the mystery of the Green Knight, and accordingly the

mysteriousness of the adventure Gawain undertakes in finding him. This, coupled with the ultimate incompleteness of the romance's internal folklore, suggests that one of the *Gawain*-Poet's principal narrative strategies was to create a sense of irresolvability, what we might call a purposeful obscurity, in his romance, and through the Green Knight's strange and arbitrary games (that both create and are created through the text's lack of intra-world saturation) he can show Gawain being tested in the most unexpected, and therefore most challenging, of ways.⁶⁷

The author of *Amadas et Ydoine* also utilizes this same sort of functional irresolvability by leaving the internal folklore of his romance incomplete. The supernatural knight in this romance abducts Amadas's lover Ydoine and, before returning her, places on her finger an invisible ring that makes her appear to die. Then, later, as Amadas guards her grave late at night, the mysterious knight leaps over the cemetery wall on his charger and challenges him for Ydoine's body. Amadas, like Gawain, initially thinks he may be a devil (5601–10), but like the Green Knight, he is not.⁶⁸ When he first speaks to Amadas he invokes the name of God—a proof of his non-demonic nature that leaves Amadas very much relieved (5719–20). However, beyond this, as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the author gives no definitive conclusions as to his true nature, but also as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, this supernatural knight carries with him many of the trappings of fairy. His courtiers accompanying him are all seated on pure-white palfreys adorned with bells and gems, and the knight, as mentioned, is himself beautiful. It is a beauty, a richness, beyond the normal—an extravagance of the Otherworld.⁶⁹ He, too, possesses extreme power—power to forestall his own death, to work enchantments, and to test Amadas by means beyond any normal human agency.

In the romance's culminating battle Amadas eventually manages to strike a mortal blow, but the mysterious knight does not die. Instead he tells Amadas that Ydoine is not dead—that she is merely under his enchantment. He then says he must, before sunrise, go “to God” (“*a Diu*,” 6433), after which he explains that God would not have allowed him to kill Amadas, for it is not in his nature (though it seems throughout the whole battle it was his intention to do exactly that). As in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the author never provides any suggestion as to why the knight did what he did. His violence is arbitrary and unmotivated, and to a certain extent beyond

any conceivable explanation. Furthermore, embedded within this illogical testing is the supernatural knight's deep concern for those inner virtues. Like the Green Knight, as with other fairies or fairy-like characters, his true test is not physical, but moral, and the martial combat, ultimately, is but a means of testing Amadas's inner self—his courage and his devotion to his beloved. While the Green Knight may edge the boundary between human and fairy, this knight hovers somewhere between fairy and angel. Ultimately, therefore, his true supernatural status remains ambiguous. The author gives enough implicit fictional facts to suggest that there is, indeed, an alternative world existing within the text-world of the romance. But what sort of world is it? The romance's internal folklore is not sufficiently developed for the audience to come to any concrete conclusions, and the effect is the cultivation of an aesthetic of mystery that not only allows the author to develop interest in his narrative, but also that allows him to create particularly challenging and imaginative tests for his hero.

If the internal folklore of *Amadas et Ydoine* is not completely or coherently developed, however, the internal folklore of *Richard Coer de Lion* is even less so. The author of this fourteenth-century romance begins with Henry II, who is in search of a wife. Henry accordingly sends his messengers to seek out “þe ffeyreste wymman þat wore on liff” (51), a declaration that, considering the superlative beauty of fairy mistresses discussed earlier, seems to be inviting trouble.⁷⁰ These men sail out to sea, and when they are far off the coast the wind uncannily stops, at which point they see a “noble schyp” of unmatched worth and splendor (60–72). Like the ship, the people on board are all of superlative beauty, and when Henry's messengers come aboard they find the most beautiful one of all, Cassodorien—the most beautiful woman in the world. Henry eventually takes her hand in marriage, but during the ceremony,

Befforn þe eleuacyoun
þe qwene fel in swowne adoun;
þe folk wondryd and were adrad;
Into a chaumbyr sche was lad,
Sche seyde: ‘For j am þus jschent,
I dar neuere see þe sacrament’. (189–94)

The marriage is consummated, though, and Cassodorien bears three children, Richard being the eldest. They live together in peace for fifteen

years, but when one of Henry's earls persuades him to have Cassodorien restrained for the duration of a mass, matters are quickly brought to a head. When the sacrament is presented,

Sche took here douȝtyr in here hond,
And Johan her sone she wolde not wonde;
Out of the rofe she gan her dyght,
Openly before alle theyr syght.
Johan fell frome her in that stounde,
And brak his thygh on the grounde.
And with her doughter she fled her waye,
That never after sche was iseye.
The kynge wondred of that thyng,
That she made suche an endyng,
For loue that he was serued so;
Wolde he neuer after come there ne go.⁷¹ (227–40)

What Cassodorien is, whether human, fairy, or demon, is never explained, but her failure to pass the Eucharist test very much suggests both human and fairy may be ruled out. The problem with this, though, is that aside from her inability to withstand the Elevation of the Host, she betrays no further demonic qualities. The marriage negotiations orchestrated solely between Henry and her father, the king of Antioch, would seem to imply that she is human, merely a young girl “at my faderys wyll” (178), but the mysteriousness of Henry's messengers's initial encounter with her, coupled with the extreme beauty and richness of her ship and its crew, would tend to suggest she may be a fairy, or something vaguely fairy-like, and her taking of her daughter as she flies out of the roof seems more reminiscent of the actions of a fairy, such as Pressine, than of anything demonic. After her departure Cassodorien is never heard from again, and as the author moves on to focus largely on Richard's crusading in the east, her function in the romance seems to be only to provide him with an extraordinary lineage (as if Eleanor of Aquitaine was not enough). However, like some children of supernatural parentage, such as Guinglain in *Le Bel Inconnu* and Mervine in *Mervine Son of Ogier*, Richard never exhibits any supernatural abilities himself. But if Cassodorien is at least ambiguously demonic, she may be seen to have some influence on the development of Richard's character, for even though he is the hero of the romance, the unsympathetic treatment of

his ruthlessness in battle, coupled with his cannibalistic appetite for roast Saracen, may be seen as deriving from his quasi-diabolical origins.

This treatment of Cassodorien, and later of Richard, exemplifies the extent to which a romance author could, by manipulating fairy motifs, create an overdetermined romance without a coherent or complete internal folklore to generate various narrative and aesthetic effects, such as generating plot, creating mystery and wonder, heightening danger, or providing a hero with an exceptional supernatural lineage. Just as Morgan can vacillate between human and fairy from one romance to the next according to authorial needs, and just as treatments of fairy-like figures such as Melior can evolve within an individual text-world, ambiguously fairy-like figures, and even ambiguously demonic figures, can become attached to fairy motifs and take on fairy-like attributes even though their true nature, and the true nature of the worlds from which they originate, remains, in the end, irresolvable. All of these figures, from Morgan to Cassodorien, bring to the human worlds of their texts something of fairy—some quality of the Otherworld—though on account of their multiple or ambiguous associations, romance authors could take advantage of the best of both the human and the fairy worlds, and, occasionally, the worlds of the angelic and the demonic. In all cases, though, it is their fairy-like qualities that set them apart, that allows them to fulfill roles that, as romance developed, only fairies could. The remainder of this book will focus on these roles specifically, beginning with the most widespread and well-known of fairy motifs: Avalon.

CHAPTER 2

AVALON: SIMULACRA AND FICTIONAL FACTS

Set et inclitus ille rex Arthurus letaliter uulneratus est; qui illinc ad sananda uulnera sua in insulam Auallonis.

[Arthur himself, our renowned king, was mortally wounded and was carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that his wounds might be attended to.]

—Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britannie*¹

The voyage of the dying Arthur to the Isle of Avalon is perhaps the best illustration of the mutability of a single motif developed continually from the twelfth century into the renaissance and beyond. It was employed by chroniclers, historians, court poets, and writers of popular romances. It found its way into both Latin and the vernacular languages, emerged in both verse and prose, and existed, as there is strong evidence to suggest, in an oral tradition that predated and ran alongside these written texts. The quotation from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie* occupies a position of foremost importance not only because it is the first written account of Arthur's voyage to Avalon, edging the boundary between oral and textual traditions, but more importantly because it proved to be extremely influential on the development of the Avalon motif in the centuries to follow. It is with this description, composed around 1138, that Geoffrey ends the life of Arthur in his narrative of British history from the destruction of Troy to the death of Cadwallader in AD 689. The *Historia* reaches its apex in its depiction of Arthur's life, and, perhaps because of this, it emerges as a twelfth-century equivalent of an instant bestseller.

This popularity is reflected in the survival of at least forty-eight copies of the *Historia* originating from within a generation of Geoffrey's lifetime, and

its popularity showed little signs of slowing down in the following centuries. Over 200 manuscripts have managed to survive from the Middle Ages, and Geoffrey's influence over later Arthurian material is equally unparalleled, as he was treated as a source and authority from Wace to Milton.² Because of its prime positioning and influential role, Geoffrey's *Historia* is an ideal point of departure for investigating Arthur's voyage to Avalon both within and across the text-worlds of romances and chronicles, and in this respect what is perhaps most interesting is not what Geoffrey presents in the world of his *Historia*, but what he leaves out.

As the opening quotation illustrates, Geoffrey's account provides only the bare outer shell of the tradition. He creates narrative space for Avalon and allows for a supernatural presence in Arthur's ending, but he provides very few details. The most obvious absence (for our immediate purposes) is Morgan le Fay, the figure who, as illustrated in the previous chapter, became most readily associated with Arthur and Avalon in the centuries to follow. It is worth noting, however, that even though Geoffrey excludes Morgan from his account, he still manages to leave open the possibility of fairy involvement, which is an element necessary for the suggestion of Arthur's return. Of course fairies are not mentioned directly, but the paradoxical notion that Arthur could have his mortal wounds (*letaliter uulneratus*) healed (*sananda*) on a mysterious island requires some form of supernatural intervention, and as the motif evolved it was Morgan who was to take on this role almost exclusively. This chapter traces representations of Avalon across a range of medieval texts from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Malory, and, as an exemplar of medieval fairies and eventual concomitant of the Avalon tradition, the role of Morgan within that motif. It does so, however, not only to map the potentialities of a long-standing fairy motif across time, but also, more significantly, to attend to questions of fictionality and possible worlds across genres.

Thus, in contributing to recent discussions of the supernatural in medieval chronicles, and to conversations about the relationship between history and romance in the period, I focus on the ways medieval chronicle writers, wary of the validity of folkloric material, deliberately generated ambiguity or indeterminacy in their treatments of marvelous material in ways analogous to the authors of romance, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, the argument in this chapter is unique in this book in that, considering the close relationship between history and romance in the

period, it maintains that representations of Arthur's passing are often driven by immediate historical and political considerations rather than *poiesis*. But this, of course, is not to say that these authors were not engaged in manipulating their material to fulfill narrative needs. Indeed, by taking legends of Arthur's passing as a particularly revealing focal point, I argue that historians consistently transformed their source material by constructing simulacra of actual-world folklores that through the process of textualization became more *real* than their actual-world referents. Similarly, while historians transformed legendary materials into simulacra, romance authors from Chrétien to Malory, operating in a matrix of oral lore, known physical remnants, and competing authorized histories, took advantage of the complexities and ambiguities in these historical texts by turning such simulacra into fictional facts. That is, they were able to maintain a simultaneous sense of historic verisimilitude and intra-narrative indeterminacy by transforming historically *real* folklore into folklore that is actual within their romances at a meta-world level. Therefore, by taking Avalon as a case study for thinking about the shifting uses of fairies as they cross the generic divide between chronicle and romance, this chapter seeks to illuminate a particular way in which the authors of both fictional and historiographical texts played against each other within wider imaginative networks.

The History of Avalon

The origins of Geoffrey's Avalon and the anticipated return of Arthur are difficult to trace. His *Historia* is not the product of a sealed-off learned/literate culture. There is strong evidence to suggest that the surviving written versions of twelfth-century chronicles represent but a fragment of the material circulating within and between court and cloister, not to mention among the populace generally, and much of the development of the Avalon motif would likely have been oral.³ Aside from any acknowledged or otherwise direct references to other historians, accounts of Avalon would have been developed out of material generally shared. As Carl Watkins has noted, twelfth-century wonder stories that have come down to us seem to have erupted out of a larger, and largely lost, oral-literate culture. And it is in this type of environment that stories of Avalon

would have had room to circulate, germinate, and grow increasingly popular and influential.⁴

In a series of three prophecies recounted by Merlin earlier in the *Historia* we are given some sense of Geoffrey's awareness of working within this oral-literate culture. In the first prophecy we are told that the Boar (Arthur) will come to a mysterious end: "exitus eius dubius erit."⁵ That Arthur's end is prophesied to be shrouded in mystery suggests the possibility of a supernatural element while also legitimating Geoffrey's enigmatic treatment of it. One of the advantages of writing prophecy retrospectively is that it can always be tailored to be accurate. Thus, not only does Merlin's prophecy legitimate Geoffrey's terse and enigmatic treatment of Arthur's passing, but Geoffrey's account of Arthur's journey to Avalon proves Merlin's prophecy true. Another instance of intra-textual symbiosis occurs in Merlin's following prophecies when he claims that Arthur will be "in ore populorum celebrabitur et actus eius cibus erit narrantibus" [[The Boar] shall be extolled in the mouths of its peoples, and its deeds will be as meat and drink to those who tell tales].⁶ This last prophecy legitimates Geoffrey's indulgences in the tales of Arthur, while at the same time (again) Geoffrey's act of narration proves Merlin's prophecy true. The previous prophecy, though, alludes to something of the oral culture Geoffrey was working within, and if we consider the way Geoffrey takes care to ensure that the two prophecies sandwiching this one are inherently true by virtue of Geoffrey's very act of narration, there remains a very strong suggestion that he is here attempting to validate the existence of stories of an historical Arthur in twelfth-century oral tradition. It is a technique that relies on the world-constructing powers of the author, as he creates what appears to be an internal folklore for the world of his narrative in which Merlin's prophecies are inherently true and, in many instances, demonstrated to be true in the course of the narrative's unfolding. But Geoffrey's narrative was both written to be, and generally received as, a *Historia*, and as such it raises questions about the applicability of possible worlds theory and the nature of internal folklore in relation to nonfictional texts.

While fictional worlds, based upon the logic of their authors' autonomous fictive constructions, provide their own criteria for discerning fact from nonfact, authenticated from nonauthenticated entities and domains, nonfictional texts are not autonomous at an intra-world level: they

always appeal to, and rely upon, the logic, and indeed the *facts*, of the perceived actual world. It may be useful to think of historical texts such as Geoffrey's as *fictive*, in the sense Hayden White uses the term, in that they constitute a construction, written to be and (generally) received as a reconstruction of an elusive historical reality, but it is possible to distinguish this sort of fictionality from fictionality in a more literary sense precisely because these historical texts are constructed to appeal to a reality beyond them.⁷ They may be fictive emplotments, but these emplotments are intended to be, and generically expected to be, recuperations of events or conditions outside the text. It follows, therefore, that generically nonfictional texts, due to their lack of intra-world autonomy, cannot contain their own internal folklore—their entities, events, and organizing principles must always be constructed to correspond with the perceived actual world. In this respect, therefore, Geoffrey's "recounting" of Merlin's prophecies emerges as a clever world-constructing strategy. These prophecies create what appear to be glimpses of an internal folklore, but because the text is self-consciously historical, and thus because that internal folklore cannot be strictly *internal*, Geoffrey creates a folklore not only within the world of his text, but also the simulacrum of a folklore in his twelfth-century world.⁸ Indeed, as I have argued (and will argue further), the folklore Geoffrey constructs in the world of his text through Merlin's prophecies *do* have referents in the actual world, but this folklore cannot be said to be a copy of those referents since it is a unique invention existing solely within the constructs of the text-world itself, an invention that (especially in dealing with such a nebulous phenomenon as folklore) contains its difference within itself precisely through the singularity of its textual reproduction. As such, then, it is impossible (either then or now) to point to a direct original for this folklore beyond the text. In other words, Geoffrey's constructions of actual-world folklores constitute internal folklores within his *Historia* that are simultaneously external.

In thinking about internal folklores that are also external, it is important to note that there is evidence to suggest that oral stories of Arthur's return did indeed circulate in Geoffrey's actual world, and this tradition would have cut both ways in terms of authentication: Geoffrey's text would have given these stories a new legitimacy, elevating them from the stuff of popular legend to the material of historical record, while at the same time the actual-world existence of these stories would have worked to endorse

Geoffrey's simulacrum of a folkloric legend within his *Historia's* text-world. Indeed, as J. S. P. Tatlock has shown, the notion of Arthur's return was alive and well, at least in certain parts of Britain, some twenty years before Geoffrey composed his *Historia*. Herman of Laon's *De Miraculis St. Mariae Laudunensis* recounts the travels of nine canons who, when the Church of Laon found itself running out of funds, went on tour with a collection of relics to perform miracles. They left just before Palm Sunday, 1113, and journeyed through northern France and southern England. The canons performed a series of miracles throughout their tour, all the while raising money, and returned the following September. During this journey they travelled into "Danavexeria" (roughly Devon and Cornwall), where they were shown Arthur's chair and oven, were told they were in "terra Arturi," and at Bodmin in Cornwall witnessed a quarrel between a local and one of their own party as to whether Arthur was still alive: "sicut Britones solent iurgari cum Francis pro rege Arturo."⁹ This is the earliest direct evidence for the belief that Arthur is still alive, and the fact that the relic-carrying canons are interested in mentioning this, the only secular anecdote in their entire account, combined with the fact that a northeastern Frenchman was strongly enough anti-Arthur to pick a fight over it, suggests the fervency of popular interest in Arthur and his expected return. Of course, there is some ambiguity as to whom Herman of Laon means by "Britones." He could be intending to denote the British generally, but judging from the geographic locations of these events it is more likely he is referring specifically to the Bretons, though, of course, there is no way of entirely ruling out the possibility he means the British. It seems likely, though, that such a myth would have originated with the Bretons, at some time, presumably, well before 1113, and, while prevailing among the Bretons and the Cornish, would have spiraled outward from there.¹⁰

Such belief in Arthur's return, it seems, moved from strength to strength in the years to follow. The next earliest mention of the legend comes in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (1125), in which he reasons that because Arthur's grave is nowhere to be found, ancient songs were created that predicted his return.¹¹ William, of course, does not believe it. In his characteristic skepticism he dismisses it as fable, distinguishing between the military exploits of the historical Arthur (*veraces historiae*) and the false fables (*fallaces fabulae*) of the raving Bretons—the Bretons' trifles (*Britonum nugae*).¹² But such a dismissal is suggestive of William's

understanding of such stories circulating among his intended audience—by 1125, William’s *Gesta* implies, Arthurian material had become the stuff of popular lore among the Bretons.¹³ Fourteen years later, Henry of Huntingdon reports that the Bretons denied Arthur’s death and expected his return.¹⁴ Another work written before the end of 1143, Ailred of Rievaulx’s *Speculum Caritatis*, drops a casual but telling reference to popular stories of Arthur circulating in the north. Ailred tells of a young Cistercian novice who was concerned that he felt little emotional response to readings or sermons on the life of Christ, but remembered being easily moved to tears by the fables men feigned and spread abroad about the legendary Arthur: “Nam et in fabulis, quae uulgo de nescio quo finguntur Arcturo.”¹⁵ It has been suggested that this could be a direct reference to Geoffrey of Monmouth, since the founder of Rievaulx, Walter Espec, owned a copy of the *Historia*.¹⁶ But this does not satisfactorily explain the young Cistercian’s familiarity with the “fables” of Arthur spread in the vernacular (*uulgo*), nor does it seem to fit with his emotional reactions to these tales. There is, of course, no way of knowing to what extent elements of Geoffrey’s *Historia* were absorbed into oral tradition by 1143, and to what extent his narrative interplayed with existing tales of Arthur, but it seems more likely that the young man would have been moved to tears, not by Walter Espec’s copy of the text, but, as Powicke suggests, by the skilled minstrelsy of the Breton *conteurs*, who were frequent visitors to the North Riding of Yorkshire.¹⁷

All of this is to suggest that in the years surrounding the completion of Geoffrey’s *Historia* there existed the popular notion, at least in certain parts of Britain, that Arthur was not dead and that he would return. But, of course, the imaginative networks supporting these stories were not solely comprised of oral legends; from Geoffrey’s *Historia* onward the legend of Arthur’s return repeatedly emerged in historical texts, and, as consistent with the earliest account of the canons of Laon, in a tradition continually affixed to the Bretons. Wace, in 1155, connects Avalon with the Bretons:

Encore i est, Bretun l’atendent,
Si cum il dient e entendent;
De la vendra, encore puet vivre. (13279–81)

[He is still there [in Avalon], awaited by the Bretons, as they say and believe, and will return and may live again.]¹⁸

Nearly sixty years later Gervase of Tilbury likewise connects Avalon with a popular tradition of the Bretons (*uulgarem Britonum traditionem*), and the chronicle attributed to Robert of Gloucester (c.1300) mentions the “Cornwalisse” as sharing the “Hope” with the “Brutons” (4589–91).¹⁹ Pierre de Langtoft, writing slightly later than Robert of Gloucester, is unsure whether Arthur is dead or not, but notes the Bretons say he is still alive. In 1338, Pierre de Langtoft’s redactor, Robert Mannyng of Brunne, refers to the tradition as “þe Bretons lye,” and in the immensely popular English prose *Brut* (c.1380), it is the “Britons” who suppose Arthur “leueþ in a-nopere lande,” and that he shall come again to “conquere al Britaigne.”²⁰ Furthermore, in the *Fall of Princes* (1431–39) Lydgate ascribes to the Bretons the belief that Arthur shall come again to “regne in Breteyne.”²¹ Looking back to Geoffrey then, it seems this Breton connection may have had implications for Geoffrey’s treatment of Arthur’s death in his *Historia*.

It has been suggested before that Geoffrey refuses to give more than only the outer form of the Avalon tradition because he is conscious of his acknowledged *rôle* as an historian. But this seems an unsatisfying explanation. We can dismiss the notion of a skeptical historian unwilling to engage with the supernatural, as elsewhere in the *Historia*, most notably in his treatment of Merlin, we find him more than willing to admit the role of the supernatural in his history. It seems more likely, as I would like to suggest, that he treads carefully around Arthur’s death because the event puts him into a rather tight sociopolitical bind. Though we know relatively little about Geoffrey outside his texts, there is sufficient evidence to suggest he was probably of Breton blood, though brought up in a Norman environment, on the Welsh marches.²² Accordingly, he was aligned with, or was attempting to align himself with, the high-ranking members of Anglo-Norman society to whom he dedicated his work and from whom he was possibly seeking patronage.²³ These affiliations conflict in his depiction of Arthur’s death, and this, I would like to suggest, leads to the inconclusive and enigmatic treatment Geoffrey provides.

His Breton heritage would favor the notion of Arthur’s return, which would require an emphasis on the supernatural, that is, an emphasis on fairy involvement. But his Norman allegiances would favor just the opposite. The Norman rulers of England were engaged in a longstanding project of

squelching ideas of Arthur's return, which they thought would dissuade the Bretons from anticipating his aid in resisting the Norman kings.²⁴ Indeed, considering events in the aftermath of the death of Henry I in December 1135, Geoffrey's ambiguous treatment of Avalon takes on a certain political topicality. From 1136–38 Anglo-Norman power suffered major setbacks in Wales. Richard Fitz Gilbert and Payn Fitz John, two leading magnates, were killed in pitched battle, and widespread rebellions led to the Welsh reconquest of nearly the whole of Ceredigion.²⁵ As a passage in the Anglo-Norman *Description of England* (c.1140) describes,

Ben s'en vengerent les Waleis.

De noz Franceis mult unt ocis,

De noz chastels se sunt saisiz;

Apertement le vont disant,

Forment nus vont maneçant,

Qu'a la parfin tute l'avrunt,

Par Arthur la recoverunt. (241–47)

[Well have the Welsh avenged themselves.

Many of our French they have slain,

Some of our castles they have taken;

Openly they go about saying,

Fiercely they threaten us,

That in the end they will have all;

By means of Arthur they will win it back.]²⁶

In the midst of such political upheaval, therefore, in which the notion of Arthur's return acted as an ideological fulcrum, Geoffrey's writing of Arthur's passing to Avalon betrays a shrewd use of politically conscious ambiguity. Morgan le Fay is absent from Geoffrey's account and the fairies are consigned to the subtext, and with them, so too any firm commitment to the idea of Arthur's survival. But Geoffrey walks a fine line in this passage. He attempts to satisfy his Norman patrons by excluding any direct mention of the possibility of Arthur's return, while at the same time he aligns himself with his Breton heritage by leaving in place the narrative framework necessary for such a return, ensuring that, as Merlin prophesied, Arthur's death remains shrouded in mystery.

This treatment, however, did not sit well with some of his contemporaries. Certain rules governed the writing of history in the twelfth

century, and Geoffrey's *Historia*, according to at least some of his peers, flew in the face of acceptable standards. There were certain authorized channels through which *historia* (the material of authentic narrative) could be distinguished from *fabula* or *ficta* (the material of stories or legends).²⁷ In his early-thirteenth-century *Otia Imperialia*, Gervase of Tilbury outlines these authorities in the preface to his section on wonders (where a rubric for the assessment of true narrative proves especially helpful). After noting that the "crude falsehood of idle tales should be spurned" (*fabularum mendaciis*), he goes on to say that the only matters suitable for history are those which are

uetustatis auctoritas comprobauit aut scripturarum firmauit auctoritas aut cotidiane conspectionis fides oculata testatur.

[sanctioned by the authority of age, or confirmed by the authority of scripture, or attested by daily eyewitness accounts.]²⁸

It seems Geoffrey was aware of these conventions as well, and for this reason he claimed to have had access to an otherwise unknown ancient book (*uetustissimus liber*) in the British language discovered by his friend Walter, archdeacon of Oxford. Old Books were extremely important for the medieval historian for the simple fact that they were authorized, that is, because they were composed by credible (and necessarily ancient) authorities. As such, then, they literally contained and transported historical truth into the present. Whether Geoffrey actually had access to an ancient book is of little relevance here. What matters most is that he was aware of this convention, and by claiming an ancient authority, he attempted (by and large successfully) to lend sufficient credibility to his subject matter.

William of Newburgh, however, was not at all convinced. In the prologue to his late-twelfth-century *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* William aimed to undermine Geoffrey's credibility, claiming that Geoffrey took stories about Arthur from the old fictitious accounts of the Bretons, added to them from his own imagination, and then set the fiction in Latin to make it appear to be an honorable history [*pro eo quod fabulas de Arturo ex priscis Britonum figmentis sumptas et ex proprio auctas per super-ductum Latini sermonis colorem honesto historiae nomine palliauit*].²⁹ Geoffrey may have claimed an ancient book as his authority, but William had found no such source, and

ergo nec tenuem de his veteres historici fecerint mentionem, liquet a mendacibus esse conficta quaecunque de Arturo atque Merlino ad pascendam minus prudentium curiositatem homo ille scribendo vulgavit.

[since the historians of old [Gildas and Bede] have made not even the slightest mention of these persons, clearly all that Geoffrey has published in his writing about Arthur and Merlin has been invented by liars to feed the curiosity of those less wise.]³⁰

Moreover, William connects Avalon with the Bretons and maintains that Geoffrey insists, for fear of the Bretons, that Arthur may return:

Et notandum quod eundem Arturum postea refert in bello letaliter vulneratum, regno disposito ad curanda vulnera sua abiisse in illam quam Britannicae fingunt fabulae insulam Avallonis, propter metum Britonum non audens eum dicere mortuum, quem adhuc vere bruti Britones exspectant venturum.

[And we should further note that he subsequently reports that this same Arthur was mortally wounded in war, and that once he had set his kingdom in order he departed to nurse his wounds to the island of Avalon, famed in the invented tales of the Bretons; and because of fear of the Bretons, Geoffrey does not dare to pronounce him dead, for the brutish Bretons believe that he really will still come.]³¹

William is particularly scathing of Geoffrey's use of history here, but before we start to view William as an historian too skeptical to venture into the realm of the marvelous, we would do well to remind ourselves of his own fairy stories.

Later in the same work William gives an account of a young Yorkshire peasant who, while returning home one night after visiting a friend in a neighboring village, heard singing and friendly conversation coming from a small hill just off the road. Upon further inspection he found a whole crowd feasting inside. Soon one of the servants spotted him and offered him a drink. He took the cup but deliberately refused to drink from it, and after pouring out the contents, he escaped unharmed, cup in hand. As it turns out, this cup of "unknown material, unusual colour, and strange shape," ended up as a gift for Henry I, and after being passed around for a number of years, eventually ended up in the hands of Henry II.³²

How then, can William be so critical of Geoffrey's *Historia*, yet in the same work treat an account of a stolen fairy cup with such earnestness? To conclude his chapter on "Some Marvelous Events," in which this account is given, he notes that "haec et hujusmodi incredibilia viderentur nisi a dignis fide testibus contigisse probarentur" [these and similar stories would appear incredible were they not proved to have happened by witnesses worthy of

belief].³³ Thus it is not the inclusion of fairies into historical narratives that make historians like William uneasy, but rather the treatment of such marvels without the validation of authoritative sources.³⁴ For the twelfth-century historian then, as Gervase of Tilbury notes, eyewitness accounts of worthy individuals are sufficient to validate an account, regardless of how marvelous or unusual it may be.³⁵ It is on this basis that Gervase justifies his discussion of incubi and succubae, arguing that there is “exinde fama creberrima: multi enim experti sunt, et ab expertis audierunt certissime, quibus est fides adhibenda” [a widespread folk-belief in a phenomenon which many people have experienced themselves, or have heard reliably described by others with first-hand experience, whose word is trustworthy].³⁶ Gervase, like William of Newburgh, is invested in the project of history, of representing the past and the world around him as accurately and authoritatively as possible. But also like William, Gervase found it hard to pass up a good story, to “gratify popular belief and the listeners’s ears.” In certain cases, as in his story of incubi, he has sufficient evidence to back up his account and is therefore able to both teach and delight at the same time. In other cases, though, these impulses come into conflict with each other. One such account occurs when he reaches the point of Arthur’s voyage to Avalon in his adaptation of Geoffrey’s *Historia*:

Vnde secundum uulgarem Britonum traditionem, in insulam d’Aualum ipsum dicunt translatum, ut uulnera quotannis recrudescantia sub inter-polata sanatione curarentur a Morganda fatata, quem fabulose Britones post data tempora credunt reditum in regnum.

[there arose the popular tradition of the Bretons, whereby they claim that Arthur was carried off to the Isle of Avalon, in order that his wounds, which break open afresh every year, might be healed by the ever-renewed ministrations of Morgan le Fay. And the Bretons fancifully believe that after a given time Arthur will return to his kingdom.]³⁷

Morgan le Fay was a problematic figure for historians like Gervase; though she was extremely well-known within their imaginative networks, she lacked any consistent form of historical validation. Gervase, however, like numerous historians from Wace to the author of the prose *Brut*, manages to skirt the issue of the historicity of Morgan and Avalon by putting it down as a popular story of the Bretons: the folkloric belief in Arthur’s return may not have been accepted as a fact of the actual world, but the fact that such a folklore existed certainly was, and in recounting the legend *as a legend* Gervase allows himself the best of both worlds. He can tell a good story,

ornamented with marvelous wounds, fairy healing, and the idea of Arthur's return, and he can do it all without falling into the danger of compromising his historical project.

Much like the Arthurian folklore Geoffrey constructs in his *Historia*, therefore, Gervase develops an internal folklore for his narrative that is also external. That is, he creates a simulacrum of a “uulgarem Britonum traditionem” that is not only a *fictive* construction of an elusive historical reality, but also, within the construct of the text, a simulacrum that becomes more *real* than the “tradition” itself. That is to say, the folkloric belief in Avalon, specifically in the unique form in which Gervase describes it, becomes authenticated; like Geoffrey's prophecies of Merlin, it becomes actualized, *textualized*, as *historia*—the material of true narrative. Implicit within this is the notion that once the simulacrum becomes textualized, it takes a privileged position over its elusive historical referent.³⁸ This simulacrum, therefore, is not “a falsehood that causes one to take one sign for another [. . .] and the converse possibility of taking this sign for its opposite, the simultaneous coming of the Same and the Other,” as Foucault develops his notion of simulacra, but rather it is an image that recalls its actual-world referent, but through the process of textualization, it assumes a privileged position as a thing more historio-graphically *real* than its presumed original.³⁹

Such histories, therefore, from William of Malmesbury's discussion of *Britonum nugae* onward, are not texts devoid of representations of what may be considered nonactual entities or states of affairs, but rather texts that may include both actual-world facts and nonfacts. And though, as a generic requirement, authors must distinguish between the two, these facts and nonfacts interplay with each other in the cumulative building of the historic reality represented in the narrative's text-world. As a cultural phenomenon existing within the imaginative networks in which these histories participated, therefore, Avalon was consistently treated as a matter of history, though, in this sense, it was not always considered historical.

From History to Romance

Roughly fifteen years after his *Historia*, Geoffrey of Monmouth broke free from all such conventions of historical exposition. His *Vita Merlini*, a work that falls somewhere in the generic gaps of twelfth-century letters, reads

more like a work of secular hagiography, like an imaginative Life of a wonder-worker, than anything related to history or even romance. It is the first time we are given an unrestrained look at Avalon, and, accordingly, the first time Morgan makes an appearance. Here Geoffrey calls it the *insula pomorum*, the Island of Apples, which as early as 1125 William of Malmesbury reasoned to be synonymous with Avalon.⁴⁰ Later in the century Gerald of Wales elaborates on this more fully in his *De Principis Instructione*, noting that the Island of Avalon is, in the Welsh tongue, called “*Inis Avallon*,” that is the “*insula pomifera*.” This, Gerald explains, is because *Aval* is the Welsh word for apple, a fruit that grows in abundance there.⁴¹ In the *Vita Merlini* Avalon is similarly described as a place where fruit grows in abundance, without the need of cultivation. It is also the home of Morgan:

Illic jura novem geniali lege sorores
dant his qui veniunt nostris ex partibus as se,
quarum que prior est fit doctior arte medendi
exceditque suas forma prestante sorores.
Morgen ei nomen didicitque quid utilitatis
gramina cuncta ferant ut languida corpora curet.
Ars quoque nota sibi qua scit mutare figuram
et resecare novis quasi Dedalus aera pennis. (916–23)

[That is the place where nine sisters exercise a kindly rule over those who come to them from our land. The one who is first among them has greater skill in healing, as her beauty surpasses that of her sisters. Her name is Morgen, and she has learned the uses of all plants in curing the ills of the body. She knows, too, the art of changing her shape, of flying through the air, like Daedalus, on strange wings.]⁴²

In this earliest description of Morgan she arrives on the scene in high form, adorned with many of the trappings of what will later become standard characteristics of fairy mistresses in romance: beauty, power, skill in healing, and dominion over a blissful and mysterious realm. The Avalon motif comes fully developed as well. After being wounded in the battle of Camlan Arthur is brought to the *insula pomorum* where Morgan can tend to his wounds:

nos quo decuit Morgen suscepit honore,
inque suis talamis posuit super aurea regem
fulcra manuque sibi detexit vulnus honesta
inspexitque diu, tandemque redire salutem

posse sibi dixit, si secum tempore longo
esset et ipsius vellet medicamine fungi. (933–38)

[Morgen received us with due honour. She put the king in her chamber on a golden bed, uncovered his wound with her noble hand and looked long at it. At length she said he could be cured if only he stayed with her a long while and accepted her treatment.]

That the Avalon motif comes so fully formed in such an early account may suggest a certain degree of oral interplay, though it is of course impossible to work out exactly which elements Geoffrey absorbed from popular legend and which he simply invented. As noted, popular tales of Arthur's supernatural survival were circulating in oral culture before Geoffrey's *Historia*, and this text locates that survival in Avalon, but what was Morgan's role in the Avalon tradition before the *Vita Merlini*, if she in fact had one at all? At present such questions are unanswerable. We have no extant allusions to Morgan earlier than this, and the notion of her being a remnant of lingering Celtic traditions can be dismissed, as Morrigan and Morgan are not cognate.⁴³

Within twenty years of the *Vita Merlini*, though, she appears again in Avalon in much the same role, though this time, as mentioned in the previous chapter, she is introduced as a “nympha perennis” in Etienne de Rouen's *Draco Normannicus*, and within a couple more years she emerges again in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*.⁴⁴ Here she is again associated with Avalon (1918–21) and known for her skill in healing (4171–78), and her appearance in the extended roll-call of Arthurian characters in *Erec* (1896–1973) suggests that, like Geoffrey in the *Vita Merlini*, Chrétien may have been deriving her character from material already partially formed in either previous now-lost texts or in oral legend. What is significant about Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*, though, is that he is for the first time (as far as the surviving sources indicate) giving an extended textual presence to Arthurian *fabulae*, to what William of Malmesbury had called *Britonum nugae*, some twenty years before Chrétien. In stepping out of his *rôle* as an historian he could create an autonomous text-world with its own unique internal folklore, and therefore indulge in fictional episodes emancipated from the strict responsibilities of historical exposition.

However, the idea of a “fictional episode” is not a simple one. Perhaps a useful place to begin is D. H. Green's recent study of twelfth-century romance in which he proposes a definition of fictionality based on the concept of “make-believe.” Green suggests the following:

Fiction is a category of literary text which, although it may also include events that were held to have actually taken place, gives an account of events that could not conceivably have taken place and/or of events that, although possible, did not take place, and which, in doing so, invites the intended audience to be willing to make-believe what would otherwise be regarded as untrue.⁴⁵

This is a thoroughly *pragmatic* or *contextual* definition of fictionality, in which a text is considered fictional not by any property or component of the text itself, but rather by its relative position to other texts, and indeed, to the perceived *reality* of the actual world in the text's given cultural context. Of course, it is difficult to overemphasize the complications that arise from trying to discern what any given audience would have considered "events that could not conceivably have taken place," or what an intended audience would have "regarded as untrue," but such a pragmatic definition of fictionality is useful in that it highlights the constructedness of fictional text-worlds in relation to the supposed facts of the actual world or of other self-consciously historical texts existing within the same imaginative network. In determining fictionality, too, it is worth stressing the autonomous nature of fictional texts and the role of *poiesis* in their construction, that is, the intent of the author in positioning his or her work within that imaginative network and creating an internal folklore to be make-believed in.

Indeed, it seems the distinction in the twelfth century between history and fiction, between actual and nonactual states, had less to do with separating truth from untruth than with authorial intent—with the author's fidelity to an assumed author/audience agreement. It had to do with the structures established within an historic narrative whereby the author can validate its content through the agreed-upon method of citing credible *auctores*. Geoffrey's *Historia* may be historically "untrue" in the sense that he likely invented much of the narrative himself, but there is no indication that he is presenting his material as anything but authentic history. In fact, he goes out of his way to follow the rules of historical writing. In attempting to forge this author/audience agreement he claims a *uetustissimus liber* as his source, a book that gives a complete and chronological description of the British kings, a book that "Bruto primo rege Britonum usque ad Cadualadrum filium Caduallonis actus omnium continue et ex ordine perpulcris orationibus proponebat" [laid out in beautiful language all of the deeds, continually and in order, from Brutus first king of the Britons without interruption straight through to

Cadwallader, son of Cadwallo].⁴⁶ Furthermore, when Geoffrey describes Arthur's passing, he situates the account between specific (and therefore intuitively verisimilar) details, first listing at length the names of the men on both sides who fell in the battle against Mordred, and then after the account of Avalon, affixing to it a firm historical date: "anno ab incarnatione Domini .dxlii." Such strategies for maintaining a generic author/audience agreement, however, were not entirely successful, for when William of Newburgh criticizes the *Historia*, he explicitly attacks Geoffrey's historical methods; he argues that because Geoffrey's material is absent in the writings of Gildas and Bede, and because he draws his material from fables and popular stories, his *Historia* is simply invented (*conficta*), and thus, not sufficiently authorized to be deemed genuine history.⁴⁷

Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*, though, escapes all such criticisms. It does so not because it is in any sense less "untrue," but rather because Geoffrey never places it in an historic framework that requires *auctorial* validation. What makes it fictional is that every element of the narrative does not *have* to correspond with the reality of the actual world—it constitutes an independent text-world with its own internal folklore. The text could contain some truth (few medieval historians would deny the existence of an historical Merlin), but there was generic license for that truth to be mixed with the imaginative products of the author without distinguishing between the two. The *Vita Merlini* opens with Geoffrey declaring his intentions to write fiction from the beginning: "Fatidici vatis rabiem musamque jocosam / Merlini cantare paro" (1–2) [I set myself to sing of the madness of the bard of prophecy, an entertaining tale of Merlin].⁴⁸ There are no references to authoritative sources and no suggestions that it should be received as historically accurate: in constructing a unique internal folklore within an independent text-world Geoffrey sets out to entertain, and in that other twelfth-century historians found no fault.

Wace, in his vernacular formulation of British history in the twelfth century, takes a similarly rigorous approach in distinguishing between historical and fictional writing. He is careful to distinguish his *Roman de Brut*, which he claims is an historical work, from the stories of professional minstrels, who are themselves no more than *fableüirs* who make up tales about Arthur and the Round Table (9795–98). In this he is closely aligned with William of Malmesbury's conception of *Britonum nugae*, but at the

same time he is willing to admit that these *fables* are truth mixed with untruth, that they include matters that are

Ne tut mençunge ne tut veir,
Ne tut folie ne tut saveir. (9793–94)

[neither all a lie nor all truth, neither all folly nor all wisdom.]

Fiction then, for Wace, is not strictly imaginative narrative; rather it is narrative that may reconstruct actual states, but also allows for the creative interplay of the author. But when faced with such a concoction, how is one to tell the actual from the nonactual? Unlike historical writing, there were no rules to govern the presentation of fictional material. This dilemma seems to have been a source of anxiety for Wace, who presents his *Roman de Brut* as a translation of his principal source—Geoffrey’s *Historia*.⁴⁹ This puts Wace in a unique position. He was invested in the project of writing history, but his *auctor*, that which authorizes his claim to truth, was seen as suspect by some of his contemporaries, and, it seems, by him as well.

True to conventions of historiographical practice, Wace begins his history by citing a source, and he is sure to note as well that his project aims to recount the truth of this source:

Maistre Wace l’ad translaté
Ki en conte la verité (7–8)

[Master Wace has translated it, who recounts the truth about it.]

But by the time he gets to Arthur’s voyage to Avalon, his anxieties get the better of him. He begins the account with a caveat that potentially undermines his *auctor*: “si la geste ne ment” [if the chronicle is true]. He then goes on to present the account in a series of overtly cautious rhetorical maneuvers:

Arthur, si la geste ne ment,
Fud el cors nafrez mortelment;
En Avalon se fist porter
Pur ses plaies mediciner.
Encore i est, Bretun l’atendent,
Si cum il dient e entendent;
De la vendra, encor puet vivre.
Maistre Wace, ki fist cest livre,

Ne volt plus dire de sa fin
 Qu'en dist li prophetes Merlin;
 Merlin dist d'Arthur, si ot dreit,
 Que sa mort dutuse serreit.
 Li prophetes dist verité;
 Tut tens en ad l'um puis duté,
 E datera, ço crei, tut dis,
 Si il est morz u il est vis.
 Porter se fist en Avalun,
 Pur veir, puis l'Incarnatiun
 Cinc cenz e quarante dous anz. (13275–93)

[Arthur, if the chronicle is true, received a mortal wound to his body. He had himself carried to Avalon, for the treatment of his wounds. He is still there, awaited by the Bretons, as they say and believe, and will return and will live again. Master Wace, who made this book, will say no more of his end than the prophet Merlin did. Merlin said of Arthur, rightly, that his death would be doubtful. The prophet spoke truly: ever since, people have always doubted it and always will, I think, doubt whether he is dead or alive. It is true that he had himself borne away to Avalon, five hundred and forty-two years after the incarnation.]

Like Gervase of Tilbury roughly sixty years later, Wace sidesteps any firm commitment to the historicity of Arthur's sustained life in Avalon by ascribing it to the popular lore of the Bretons. And like Geoffrey of Monmouth, he finds the prophecies of Merlin a useful rhetorical tool, despite the fact that he omits them from his text earlier.⁵⁰ These prophecies, which Wace insists are true, provide historic validation for the folklore associated with Arthur in Avalon, while at the same time, since Merlin prophesied that Arthur's death would be *dutuse*, they legitimate Wace's allusive treatment of the subject. The only thing Wace insists on as historic fact is that Arthur had himself taken to Avalon in AD 542, but, of course, he narrates more than that. In describing what the Bretons "*dient e entendent*," he creates a simulacrum of a folklore that allows him to include the notion of Arthur's return. It is a strategy by which he can keep a safe distance from such historically unsubstantiated material, and, indeed, by which he can fashion himself—"Maistre Wace, ki fist cest livre"—as a sophisticated and critically skeptical author. In the end, he insists on saying no more than Merlin did, and with that he considered himself to be on safe ground.

As revealed in Wace's *Brut*, along with a number of other texts discussed earlier in this chapter, fairies do not fit comfortably into historical narratives. This is largely a result of the fact that there was not sufficient authorization to validate their historicity, but there is another reason fairies

cause problems for historic narratives, and this is related to the way such histories are based on chronological sequences of events, on the presentation of monarchs “en ordre,” as Wace says (5), or as Geoffrey says, “continue et ex ordine.” As we have already seen in the *Vita Merlini* the presentation of the details of a supernatural fairy world result in a dehistoricization of the narrative. The *insula pomorum* of the *Vita Merlini* is divorced from the rules of time and space in the actual world, and is therefore removed from history. Geoffrey takes a brief passage from his *Historia*, a moment in the chronological time necessitated by historical narrative, and explodes it into a realm where time (in any linear sense) ceases to exist. It is a realm where plants grow spontaneously, where fruit is always in season, and where Arthur may live *in perpetuum*.

This timelessness, I would like to argue, is a product of Morgan’s presence—of a fairy presence. Fairies exist in fictive possible worlds where time often operates differently from that of the actual world, and for this reason fairies have a tendency to wreak havoc on historic narrative, on any narrative reconstructing states of the actual world—any narrative chronologically structured. That Arthur may reign again causes significant problems for a text ordered on the succession of kings. What happens to the primacy of the narrative’s linear time when it is invaded by a nonlinear or otherwise supernatural time? And what happens to the king reigning at the time when Arthur returns?⁵¹ Critics have widely maintained that it was Chrétien who first drove a wedge into such chronological Arthurian narratives, situated within the twelve-year period of peace amid Arthur’s campaigning, and created a fictional realm freed from the constraints of history.⁵² In doing so he initiated what would come to be a long and popular trend in writing about the Arthurian past. He created a fictional form where *fabula* can be given narrative space, and where time, if it exists in any real sense at all, operates cyclically; it is time cut off from its presumed historic context, and, as D. H. Green puts it, “even from any sense of past time.”⁵³ I would not like to contend with the notion of the primacy of Chrétien’s role in the development of romance as a fictional form, but it should be noted that he was not the first to drive such a wedge into the linear time of historic narrative. Geoffrey’s *Vita Merlini* does this some twenty years earlier, and it uses fairies to facilitate and legitimate such an explosion of narrative chronology.⁵⁴ In doing so, then, Morgan’s presence establishes a precedent for romance authors like Chrétien, as Geoffrey creates a fictive possible

world in which Arthurian figures move independently of historical conventions and expectations.

In this respect, Wace may be seen as an intermediary between history and romance. As previously noted Wace was a serious historian, dedicated to the conventions of historical practice, but also as previously noted, he was aware that within fiction there existed a space where representations of actual states and nonactual states could commingle. What is more, though, he located the nucleus of these fictional stories within the twelve year period of peace, later to be expanded and exploited by Chrétien (9787ff.). Wace alludes to the events in this period of peace in his *Brut* and assumed his audience to be acquainted with the *fabulae* thus associated (10749), but he leaves the space largely undeveloped because, aside from concerns of validation, it serves no purpose in terms of conquest and succession—the thrust of historic narrative. By locating such *fabulae* within his historic framework, though, Wace was recognizing the dynamic relationship between history and romance: even though they are at odds in the sense that one form insists on a fidelity to actual states and events and the other does not, there is a certain sense in which they are interlinked, as both forms developed out of the same core of historical material, and as a result they frequently overlap in terms of characters, motifs, and episodes.

Calogrenant's visit to the forest Brocéliande in Chrétien's *Yvain* provides a good example of the way this overlap can operate. Calogrenant, returning to Arthur's court after a series of adventures, gives an account of a marvelous spring he encountered in the enchanted forest. Throughout this report he is concerned with maintaining the truthfulness of the account, and accordingly, it is couched in the language of an eyewitness's testimony:

Car ne vuel pas parler de songe,
Ne de fable ne de mançonge,
Don maint autre vos ont servi,
Ainz vos dirai ce, que je vi. (171–74)

[for I do not wish to speak of a dream, a fable, or a lie, which many others have served you;
instead I shall tell what I have seen myself.]⁵⁵

In his *Roman de Rou*, composed just a few years before Chrétien's *Yvain*, Wace similarly reports on the Bretons' stories of a certain marvelous spring frequented by fairies in the forest of Brocéliande (3.6374–96).⁵⁶ For this

report Wace did not rely on the circulating popular lore through which he originally heard the stories, or even the eyewitness testimony of others. He went himself to verify its truthfulness in person:

La alai jo merveilles querre,
Vi la forest e vi la terre. (3.6393–94)

[I went there seeking marvels; I saw the forest and I saw the land.]

In the end Wace fails to find any fairies, and he criticizes himself, not, as some critics have suggested, for imprudently believing that the oral stories might have been true, but rather for thinking that the marvels there still existed as they did before the forest was spoiled by peasants:

La seut l'en les fees veir,
Se li Breton nos dient veir,
E altres merveilles plusors;
Aires i selt avoir d'ostors
E de grant cers mult grant plenté,
Mais vilain ont tot deserté. (3.6387–92)

[People used to see fairies there, if the accounts of the Bretons are true, and many other marvels. There used to be hawks' nests there and a huge quantity of stags, but peasants have destroyed everything.]⁵⁷

It is an episode in the *Roman de Rou* that can tell us something, not only about Wace's sophisticated and critical approach to history-writing in which the simulacrum of an actual-world folklore can be constructed—in which nonactual entities can be given space, without being validated, within rigorous historic narratives—but also considered in conjunction with Chrétien's *Yvain*, something about the way romance situates itself between circulating popular traditions and descriptions of ambiguous events in historical texts. Chrétien positions *Yvain* temporally in a historically validated Arthurian past and geographically in an actual landscape, where correspondences in place-names are suggestive of a certain historic verisimilitude. At the same time, though, he incorporates the fairy spring in Brocéliande, a folklore circulating in local and contemporary popular tradition that Wace constructs as *real* within the text of his history, and in so doing Chrétien transforms the simulacrum of an actual-world folklore into a fictional fact—a fact that takes advantage of the historically *real* but simultaneously unauthorized and ambiguous oral lore. He does this not only

to create the impression of the historicity of the fairy spring's existence, stretching back from the twelfth-century present to the sixth-century Arthurian past, but also because the motif that situates the romance in an actual landscape is also the motif that incorporates elements of this ambiguous and ultimately unverifiable legend, making the two difficult, if impossible, to untangle.

This technique of transforming the simulacra of actual-world legends into fictional facts is also used by the author of *Claris et Laris*. Over 100 years after Wace, he describes Brocéliande as a place teeming with wild-life, where one can see foxes, bears, monkeys, lions, rabbits, leopards, and so on (3305–11). But it is also a place where fairies dwell—“Le fees ont lor estage” (3317)—and the author therefore imagines as fictional fact an Arthurian past for Brocéliande in which it is a bountiful place full of wonders (“merveille,” 3293), a past that accords with the simulacrum of the actual-world folklore constructed by Wace and, presumably, its actual-world referent. This type of commingling is common in romance throughout the Middle Ages and is in many ways one of the defining characteristics of the form. It is indicative of fictionality in the pragmatic sense, of fiction that includes entities and events generally accepted as actual, but that is ultimately governed by the world-constructing powers of the author—fiction that is, as Wace says, “Ne tut mençunge ne tut veir.”

As romance and history developed in tandem into the next century, however, the two forms became increasingly intertwined, to such an extent that relatively clear-cut distinctions between the two become increasingly difficult to make. The early-thirteenth-century *Brut* by Laȝamon, for example, containing the first description of Avalon in English, serves as an interesting case in point. Laȝamon, of course, wrote his *Brut* as a *Historia*, and in following the rules of historiographical practice, he intended it to be received as such. His massive text (over double the length of the *Roman de Brut*) betrays direct dependence only on Wace, but in assuring ample authorization for his history, he maintains a fidelity to an assumed author/audience agreement by claiming dependence on a smattering of Old Books. His Proem describes how he travelled far and wide to obtain excellent books (“æðela boc”), of which he lists three: an English book by St. Bede, one in Latin by St. Albin, and a French book by Wace. Laȝamon then gives some indication of his compositional process, saying he put together their truthful words (“sopere word”) and combined the three books

into one (“þrumde to are”).⁵⁸ This description of his process of translation hardly fits his overwhelming dependence on Wace, and, indeed, the ways he elaborates and extends Wace in certain places, but it does betray his awareness of historiographical conventions.

This historicizing consciousness, however, does not seem consistent with his treatment of Avalon. Laʒamon is the first chronicler to give a fully unreserved, and fully unexcused, account of Arthur’s passing. Where previous historians had trodden warily around such a historically tenuous episode, Laʒamon shows little hesitation at all. When mortally wounded at Camelford, Arthur calls upon Constantin, and after entrusting the realm to him, explains:

ich wulle uaren to Aualun, to uairest alre maidene,
to Argante þere quene, aluen swiðe sceone;
and heo scal mine wunden makien alle isunde,
al hal me makien mid haleweiȝe drenchen.
And seoðe ich cumen wulle to mine kineriche
and wunien mid Brutten mid muchelere wunne.
Æfne þan worden þer com of se wenden
þat wes an sceort bat liðen, sceouen mid vðen,
and twa wimmen þerinne wunderliche idihte;
and heo nomen Arður anan, and aneouste hine uereden
and softe hine adun leiden, and forð gunnen liðen. (14277–87)

This is not the first time fairies intrude on Laʒamon’s history. Elves populate his Arthurian section widely, and in each case they are treated the same as they are here—as historically legitimate creatures neither consigned to the subtext nor dismissed as Breton *fabulae*. It has been suggested that Laʒamon was drawing here directly from Geoffrey’s *Vita Merlini*.⁵⁹ However, in lacking any linguistic parallels, the only similarities between the two are incidents common to the Avalon tradition, and there is no need to insist on any sort of textual “source” when there is ample evidence to suggest such descriptions were circulating widely in oral culture. Also, if Laʒamon was following Geoffrey’s *Vita Merlini*, one would think he would have adopted Geoffrey’s fairy queen’s name—Morgan. Indeed, the name Argante has left critics puzzled. Paton has argued that Argante is close to a common Breton and Welsh name that may have been familiar to Laʒamon, while other critics have argued that it is a corruption of Morgan or Morgant.⁶⁰ In any

case the name is curious. In all other sources Morgan is the name of the fairy queen of Avalon (aside from the slightly later paraphrase of Geoffrey's *Historia*, the *Gesta Regum Britannie*, where she is unnamed), and at present no explanation seems to adequately account for the change. It should be remembered, though, that Morgan is absent in both Geoffrey and Wace, and since Laȝamon is here unguided by his source material, he is free to invent any name he chooses, even one unattested elsewhere.

A more pressing matter, though, and perhaps one that is more curious, is how Laȝamon can include fairies *as figures from the actual world* so unreservedly. And what is even more curious (and pressing) is why he remained uncriticized for doing so. As exemplified by William of Newburgh and Gerald of Wales, Geoffrey's *Historia* received criticism for giving merely the outer shell of the motif, and historians since had shirked the question of the historicity of the event. What happened in the seventy-plus years between Geoffrey and Laȝamon that made the idea of Avalon more historically acceptable? No one answer seems paramount. One could be, simply, that since the *Brut* survives only in two manuscripts, compared to the twenty-eight surviving of Wace's *Roman de Brut* and the 217 of Geoffrey's *Historia*, Laȝamon's text did not circulate widely enough to incur the criticism to which Geoffrey was subjected.

Another possible solution, though, may have something to do with Laȝamon's Englishness. The archaistic element of his poem—his diction, poetic form, reliance on alliteration—not to mention the very choice of writing in English at a time when Latin was still the dominant language of historical writing and when French was more widely used within the court, link him closely with the Old English literary tradition.⁶¹ Moreover, he states in his Proem that he intends to relate the “noble origins of the English,” who first possessed the land of England (7–9), and this particular sense of identity with the English emerges in his account of Avalon. Like Wace before him, Laȝamon creates the simulacrum of a folklore in which the Bretons (“Bruttes”) still believe Arthur dwells in Avalon with the “fairest alre aluen” (14291), and will return again, but he attributes to Merlin, whose truthfulness he vouches for, the prophecy that his return will not be for aid of the Bretons, but for the English (“Anglen to fulste,” 14297). This identity with the English land, which is expressed within a context of historical continuity between the British and English, manifests itself in Arthur's passing to Avalon and Merlin's prophecy of his return.

Perhaps Laȝamon thought he could hang the truthfulness of the account on the acceptance of the truthfulness of Merlin, or perhaps this movement away from Arthur's return as a "Breton Hope" would sit more comfortably with Laȝamon's audience and would allow for some indulgences in historiographical practice; but these can only stand as conjectures. What counts is that a fully unqualified account of Arthur's passing to Avalon, such as is found in the *Vita Merlini*, emerges into historic narrative—a narrative that, by including such material, works to both legitimate and perpetuate the material circulating in fictional narratives and oral traditions.

It may be, too, that by the early-to-mid thirteenth century there began to be a softening of the treatment of Arthurian material. It was at this time that romance, as a newly developing fictional form, was beginning to find its feet, and the more it did, the more the line between history and romance blurred. The first third of the thirteenth century saw the development of the French Vulgate Cycle, a project of amassing and sculpting an enormous amount of romance material into a coherent (or near-coherent) narrative that assumed some characteristics of the chronicle. Just after this, too, came the development of the *Gesta Regum Britannie*, a mid-thirteenth-century metrical paraphrase of Geoffrey's *Historia* in which the author casts the material of his source into a fully fictional form. Much of the narrative structure remains similar, but the author shows no concern for practicing the rules of history—for legitimating his material through *auctores*.⁶² The framework of the narrative, the chronological progression of events, reads like Geoffrey's *Historia*, but Arthur's voyage to Avalon reads like Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*, where a regal maiden, here a "nimpha," tends to Arthur's wounds on a blissful and marvelous island (296–315). While Laȝamon's *Brut* adopts some characteristics of romance, and while the Vulgate Cycle leans toward the conventions of history, something altogether different happens in the *Gesta Regum Britannie*—here history becomes romance.

Imaginative Networks: Between History and Romance

The treatment of Arthur's voyage to Avalon in the Vulgate Cycle differs markedly from those of Laȝamon's *Brut* and the *Gesta*, and its articulation of Arthur's passing began what was to become a popular and long-lasting trend in romance representations of Avalon. In 1191, some ten years before

the compilation of the Vulgate Cycle began, Arthur's body was exhumed from its grave at Glastonbury Abbey. Around 1184–88, shortly after a fire swept through the Abbey, the monks tapped into the Avalon tradition in an attempt to increase the Abbey's reputation (and monetary intake). They argued that, based on the authority of William of Malmesbury's *De Antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesiae* (1125–35), Avalon was just another name for Glastonbury, and that the proof lay in the discovery of Arthur's and Guinevere's grave. The fame of the discovery spread wide, and the association would prove to have an enduring influence on the Avalon tradition in the centuries to follow. Gerald of Wales provides us with the earliest account of the 1191 exhumation in his *De Principis Instructione* (1193–96) and again in his *Speculum Ecclesiae*, composed about twenty years later. In both cases he presents the account based on firsthand experience (as any good twelfth-century historian would) obtained from a visit to Glastonbury in 1192. Gerald relates how Henry II had told the monks that he had heard of Arthur's grave from a Breton minstrel versed in history (*historico cantore Britone*).⁶³ Henry, however, died in 1189, and consequently the exhumation ceremony, through which the monks could prove their claim, did not happen until two years later, when Henry's successor, Richard I, visited the Abbey.⁶⁴

Henry II, who from nine to thirteen years of age was reared by his uncle Robert of Gloucester (the chief dedicatee of Geoffrey's *Historia*), was no doubt well familiar with Arthurian history, and, indeed, he had every reason for wishing to dispel the legend of Arthur's survival. According to R. R. Davies, Wales was at first "peripheral" to the Norman conquerors concerned with securing their position in England and Normandy, but by the late eleventh century and into the twelfth, due to Welsh attacks on border counties and their alliance with Saxon dissenters, the Norman rulers turned their attention to controlling the Welsh regions.⁶⁵ The Welsh, of course, fiercely resisted Norman subjugation, a resistance ideologically aided by Geoffrey's *Historia* and its early Welsh translations, which, as mentioned previously, allowed for the possibility of Arthur's return—the "Breton Hope." Indeed, Tatlock notes the early popularity of the *Historia* in Wales, and as Brynley Roberts argues, the *Brut Y Brenhinedd*, the first Middle Welsh translation of the *Historia*, was a "potent element of Welsh national consciousness" in the twelfth century and beyond.⁶⁶ During this period of Geoffrey's initial popularity, the Welsh successfully held off

Norman control; according to Welsh chroniclers, “all the Welsh united to throw off the rule of the French,” who wished to “carry into bondage and to destroy all the Britons.”⁶⁷ Indeed, Henry’s campaign in 1165 to defeat the Welsh resistance failed, and as Davies further notes, it would be almost forty years until another English king would again invade Wales.⁶⁸

It was at this time, too, that Henry was facing resistance from the continental Bretons. The Earl of Richmond, Conan IV of Brittany, denied Henry’s claim to Rennes and Nantes, and in 1167 Henry set out on a campaign to bring Conan, along with other feudal lords of Brittany holding fortifications along the Norman border, under his control. At this time Etienne de Rouen, aware of this political crisis, composed a series of satirical letters between Henry and Arthur as part of his *Draco Normannicus*. It is a text that plays with the notion of the “Breton Hope,” suggesting something of just how ubiquitous and influential the idea of Arthur’s return was for those Bretons resisting Norman domination. In mock-seriousness Etienne imagines what would happen if Arthur returned from Avalon to aid Conan and all Bretons resisting Henry. As Arthur writes to Henry:

Regum Francigenum cum regibus Angligenarum
Splendida bella scio, risus at inde meis.
Nunc igitur mando, Britonum castella relinque,
Respuit alterius gens mea ferre iugum. (268–71)

[Between the King of the French and the King of the English,
I foresee a brilliant war. I will be but amused at this.
Now therefore I command you to relinquish the castle of the Bretons;
the people refuse to bear the yoke of anyone else but me.]

Furthermore, to heighten the potential dangerousness of such a war, he imagines Arthur returning with the command of an entire host of invincible fairy warriors:

Nam fatata cohors, at impenetrabilis armis,
Quaelibet obtruncat, peruia cuncta facit. (276–77)

[For the retinue of Fairyland, now in impenetrable armor,
cuts down anything whatever, makes a way through everything.]

This, of course, is an entirely new invention by Etienne, and one never duplicated by successive authors of the Arthurian legend. Etienne likely

knew the Arthurian material through Geoffrey of Monmouth, as the library at Le Bec held a copy of his *Historia*, and indeed, Etienne cites Geoffrey within his poem (256–57). But, in creating a fully fictional text, Etienne was free to re-create the legend according to the needs of his narrative. In aiming to expose the absurdity of the “Breton Hope,” it was an advantage for Etienne to depict his Arthur in hyperbolic terms, as a supreme and invincible warlord with all its attendant fantastical associations. But as the first author to imagine a possible world in which Arthur *did* return from Avalon, Etienne was treading on new ground—so far as we know, there were no other such legends circulating in his imaginative network, and thus his imagining of Arthur’s return was entirely original in terms of both inception and execution. Ultimately, his text stands as a witness to just how ubiquitous and influential the idea of Arthur’s survival and eventual return was for those Bretons resisting Norman domination, and indeed, it is suggestive of the anxieties of the Normans attempting to subdue those who awaited such a return. It is no wonder Henry saw the advantages in killing off Arthur once and for all—in digging up his bones at Glastonbury.

The “Breton Hope,” however, died hard, as even the pageant-like exhumation orchestrated by Richard I in 1191 did little, it seems, to quiet what William of Malmesbury called the *fallaces fabulae* of the “raving” Bretons. Indeed, the Welsh successfully continued their resistance to external control well into the thirteenth century, and in 1278, in anticipation of his final Welsh campaign against Llewelyn ap Gruffydd, Edward I thought Henry II’s idea good enough to try again. On April 19 the king, accompanied by his wife Eleanor, had the tomb of Arthur and Guinevere opened, and the next day had the remains relocated to a new tomb of black marble, complete with two lions at each end and an image of Arthur at its foot.⁶⁹ It was a display intended, again, to demonstrate that Arthur was indeed really dead, but it was also (as perhaps it was with Richard) an attempt to align Arthur with the English royal line—Edward, not Llewelyn, was the true successor of Arthur. Edward’s campaign in North Wales eventually proved successful, and in 1282 the last native prince of Wales, Llewelyn, was killed. The crown in his possession, Arthur’s crown, was handed over to Edward, and the English king, obviously regarding his possession of it as symbolizing his sovereignty over Wales, took it to Westminster Abbey where he personally presented it before the High Altar.⁷⁰ The significance of the Welsh defeat was deeply felt; indeed one

contemporary English chronicler scripts it as a momentous turning point in Arthurian history: “Et sic gloria Walensium, qui primo Brittones vocabantur . . . omnino est translata. Et quicquid princeps Walliæ debuisset perfecisse, secundum prophetias, jam per dictum Edwardum completum est” [And so the glory of the Welsh who were once called Britons had been totally transferred [to the English . . .] And whatever the prince of Wales ought to have achieved according to the prophecies [of Merlin] has now been effected by King Edward].⁷¹ Like Laʒamon half a century before, Edward’s historians managed to transform Arthur’s national identity from British to English, but unlike Laʒamon, they also took the liberty of rewriting Merlin’s prophecies—Arthur was dead, and Wales, once and for all, was annexed under the English crown.

Through a series of political pageants, therefore, Edward successfully managed to reformulate the Arthurian legend, translating the invention of Arthur’s death into national fact.⁷² Edward, however, was of course more the inheritor and solidifier, rather than the sole architect, of such a reformulation. As it gradually picked up currency within both continental and insular imaginative networks from the late twelfth century onward, romance authors, well-versed in adopting and incorporating historic material into their fictional texts, began to integrate the Glastonbury/Avalon connection into their narratives in order to accord their fictional accounts of the Arthurian legend with their new understanding of Arthurian history. Indeed, the author of the *Mort Artu*, a romance written shortly after Laʒamon’s *Brut*, explicitly locates Avalon at Glastonbury. Mortally wounded, Arthur boards a ship and sails off into the unknown with Morgan and other ladies. Days later, Griflet, the only knight to witness Arthur’s departure, goes to the Black Chapel to see if Lucan had been buried. There he sees two tombs: one is Lucan’s, and inscribed upon the other is the epitaph: “CI GIST LI ROIS ARTUS QUI PAR SA VALEUR MIST EN SA SUBJECTION .XII. ROIAUMES.”⁷³

It is significant that the lone eyewitness of Arthur’s departure with Morgan, now a staple of the Avalon motif, is also the witness of his grave. As Calogrenant’s visit to Brocéliande in Chrétien’s *Yvain* illustrates, the methods of historical validation work the same in the imagined text-worlds of romance as they do in historic narratives. And just as the Brocéliande Wace investigated lends a certain historic verisimilitude to the Brocéliande

of Chrétien's romances, the Avalon/Glastonbury connection in the *Mort Artu* lends a certain verisimilar shading to the romance in connection with the numerous chronicled accounts of the exhumation of Arthur's grave in 1191 and 1278.⁷⁴ The world-constructing powers of the author enables and allows for such a radical departure from previous renderings of the Arthurian legend, but historians do not share this same autonomy—bound by their *auctores*, they had much less license for incorporating such reimaginings into their narratives. This may help to account for the surprising fact that it is not in the historical Arthurian material where the Glastonbury connection is promulgated, but in romance. Despite the fact that it became an immensely popular topic for contemporary chroniclers such as Gerald of Wales to discuss, Laȝamon's *Brut* and the *Gesta Regum Britannie* (the two chronologically structured accounts of Arthurian history based on Geoffrey and Wace written closest to 1191) show no indication of the event influencing their formulations of the Avalon motif. Indeed, this trend in Arthurian historical texts continued throughout the Middle Ages. The English prose *Brut*, for example, by far the most popular and widely circulated chronicle of the later Middle Ages, makes no mention of Glastonbury.⁷⁵ After Arthur is “wondede to þe deth,” the author of the *Brut* explains,

he lete him bene born in a liter to Auyoun, to bene helede of his wondes; and ȝitte þe Britons supposen þat he Leueþ in a-nopere lande, and þat he shal come ȝit and conquere al Britaigne; but certes þis is þe prophecie of Merlyn: he saide þat his deþ shulde bene dotous; and he saide sothe, for men þerof ȝitte hauen doute, and shal for euermore, as me saiþ, for men weten nouȝt wheþer þat he leueþ or is dede. Arthure was born to Auyoun þe xxjj ȝere of his regne.⁷⁶

It is an account of Arthur's passing, much like its original source, Wace's *Brut* (and indeed like the accounts of Gervase and Laȝamon), that creates a simulacrum of a Breton folklore based on Merlin's prophecy that Arthur's death would be “dotous.” But in nearly 250 years of repetition and translation (from Latin to Anglo-Norman to English), the simulacrum of such a Breton folklore grew increasingly distant from its historical referent. It did so, not because belief in Arthur's survival died out 250 years before—indeed the second exhumation of Arthur's grave would suggest it was alive and well, at least in the years around 1278—but instead because its treatment of Avalon was becoming increasingly intertextual, each translation or copy being just another version of an earlier simulacrum.⁷⁷

But rather than this repetition being a liability or a detriment to the prose *Brut*'s claim to historicity, it emerges, indeed, as a useful historiographical device. In vouching for the authenticity of Merlin's prophecies ("he saide sothe"), and in positioning himself as a sophisticated writer who distances himself from the folklore he narrates, the author of the prose *Brut* not only demonstrates his eye for rhetorical nuance, but also his awareness of historiographical conventions: the repetition of his *auctor*'s material, of a legitimate historical text, strengthens—not weakens—his claim to historic validity. And, in turn, the simulacrum of the Breton folklore itself becomes increasingly *real* the more it becomes textualized, the more it is reproduced in historical narratives.

But the case of the prose *Brut* is more complex than that. Cultural conceptions of Avalon had changed from the 1150s when Wace composed his *Brut*, and from the late twelfth century onward, as discussed, a smattering of alternative histories dealing with Arthur's passing competed with texts relying on earlier formulations. Indeed, these new histories had one significant advantage—that Arthur's sepulchre could be seen at Glastonbury Abbey. Of course, belief in Arthur's return was under attack as early as William of Malmesbury, but the Glastonbury discovery gave a firm counter-narrative to such dissenting voices. In the English *Polychronicon* (1385–87), for example, translated at nearly the same time as the English translation of the prose *Brut*, John Trevisa departs from Higden's original by adding in an aside that he rejects the story that "Arthur schal come aȝe, and be eft kyng here of Britayne." He calls it "a ful magel tale"—a story that has been mangled or distorted.⁷⁸ It is an account, when considered alongside the prose *Brut*, that stands as evidence of the complexities of later medieval imaginative networks in which Arthurian accounts and legends circulated. While some texts allowed for the possibility of Arthur's supernatural return, others insisted on his death and burial at Glastonbury, and authors of both traditions, certainly, composed their texts with knowledge of the other.⁷⁹ But there is an odd inconsistency—even irresolvability—in this sort of knowledge, in finding the grave of a man some thought to still be living, or, to a greater extent, in allowing for the possibility of the survival of a man whose bones are buried in a well-known tomb. The hybridity of the account in the prose *Brut*—that men "shal for euermore . . . weten nouȝt wheȝer þat he leueþ or is dede"—embraces this inconsistency, and in creating the simulacrum of a Breton folklore, allows

for the possibility of Arthur's return in a subtle and historiographically conscious way. But if histories, through simulacra, could make legend *real*, romances could play with this same material to achieve just the opposite effect.

Indeed, the *Mort Artu*, with its location of Avalon at Glastonbury, became a pivotal romance in terms of the fictional formulation of the Avalon tradition into the sixteenth century. Reworkings into English contemporary or near-contemporary with the prose *Brut*, such as the alliterative *Morte Arthure* (c.1399–1402) and the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (c.1400), the latter being, along with *Mort Artu*, a primary source for the end of Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1470–71), invariably locate Avalon at Glastonbury and the presence of Arthur's grave there as proof of his historicity—and death.⁸⁰ In Caxton's Prologue to Malory's *Morte Darthur* he answers the “dyvers men” who “holde oppynyon that there was no suche Arthur and that alle suche bookes as been maad of hym ben but fayned and fables” by pointing to “evydences of the contrarye”—the first of which being that “ye may see his sepulture in the monasterye of Glastyngburye.”⁸¹ Of course, a major consequence of being able to see Arthur's grave at Glastonbury is that it eliminates any fairy involvement, or rather it transforms earlier fairy characters into human characters—Malory's Morgan, like the Morgan in his source texts, is an enchantress, a necromancer who remains “le Fay” only in title. Morgan's humanization, then, appears to counter the “Breton Hope” within Malory's text. But this corollary was not as straightforward as it ought to have been. Malory's account of Arthur's passing differs from his sources:

Thus of Arthur I fynde no more wrytten in bokis that bene auctorysed, nothir more of the verry sertaynté of hys dethe harde I never rede, but thus was he lad away in a shyp wherein were three quenys; that one was kynge Arthur syster, quene Morgan le Fay, the tother was the quene of North Galis, and the thirde was the quene of the Waste Londis. Also there was dame Nynyve, the chyff lady of the laake

Now more of the deth of kynge Arthur coude I never fynde, but that thes ladyes brought hym to hys grave, and such one was entyred there whych [the] ermyte bare wytnes that sometyme was Bysshop of Caunturbyry. But yet the ermyte knew nat in sertayne that he was verily the body of [kyn]ge Arthur.

For thys tale sir Bedwere, a knyght of the Table Ro[un]de, made hit to be wrytten; yet som men say in many p[ar]tys of Inglonde that kynge Arthure ys nat dede, but h[ad] by the wyll of Oure Lorde Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall com agayne, and he shall wyne the Holy Crosse. Yet I woll nat say that it shall be so, but rather I wolde sey: ere in thys worlde he chaunged hys lyff. And many men say that there ys wrytten uppon the tumber thys [vers]:

The element of ambiguity in Malory's presentation of this scene is explained from the beginning—he has not any authorized sources to validate Arthur's death, and thus, in an interesting world-constructing technique, he relies on the tale written at the behest of (and presumably under the instruction of) Sir Bedwere, a “knyght of the Table Rounde.”⁸² This, of course, is an imagined textual source of the tale Malory narrates written by a character who exists solely within the world of the text. As such, therefore, it not only works to construct the internal folklore of the romance, but also, since Malory uses it to lend a certain eyewitness authenticity to his unauthorized material, it simultaneously works much like the sepulchre itself—as an element imagined to be *internal* to the narrative that leaves a (supposed) remnant in Malory's actual world.⁸³ But even this intra-textual written source is ambiguous. The one authoritative figure in the account, the hermit who was previously the Bishop of Canterbury, witnessed Arthur brought to his grave, but, according to Sir Bedwere's tale, the hermit did not know for sure if it was actually him. And in the end Malory gives his opinion: that Arthur “chaunged hys lyff”—a phrase that suggests Arthur's death, but in the end does not entirely clear up the matter.⁸⁴

What is perhaps most interesting here, for our purposes, is the extent to which Malory seems concerned with the historicity of the event.⁸⁵ The *Morte Darthur* treats material covered in earlier histories, but Malory gives no pretense of presenting the entirety of his material as historically valid, that is, as authorized by earlier histories. But then why would Malory be suddenly concerned with the historicity of his narrative here? Malory has been described as writing in a chronicle style, which is characterized by his linear narrative structure and an insistence on a detailed sense of verisimilar settings.⁸⁶ Chronicles, as with the “historical” elements in Malory's text, insist on certain specificities to time, place, and persons, and one possible solution is that Arthur's passing is a point when Malory's romance interacts with Malory's present, where, like Chrétien's *Brocéliande*, the events in his narrative leave remnants in the actual landscape—where Arthur's grave mentioned in Malory's sources is the same grave he had heard men talking about. This specificity to place implies that the Arthurian past becomes accessible to Malory's audience—that fifteenth-century readers, as Caxton

points out, are able to gain access to Arthur's sixth-century world, and, it seems, unequivocal evidence of his death.

But in the end the paradox of Arthur's presumed death and expected return, encapsulated in the Latin epitaph, shows Malory not willing to fully divorce himself from the Breton folklore developed in earlier chronicles. Indeed, Malory strives to re-create an historic mode by imitating the sort of simulacra created within these histories: "som men say in many p[ar]tys of Inglonde that kynge Arthure ys nat dede . . . men say that he shall com agayne, and he shall wyne the Holy Crosse." Here, therefore, Malory combines the fictional facts of Sir Bedwere's tale, part of a folklore *internal* to the world of his text, with a moment in the text in which he gives the illusion of reconstructing an actual-world folklore beyond the text, a simulacrum of an oral legend of Arthur's survival. By translating such a simulacrum into a fictional fact, therefore, Malory is not only able to create the impression of historic verisimilitude at a key historical point within his romance, but he is also able to take advantage of the ambiguities and irresolvabilities that had already been generated within these historical source texts. Indeed, in the same way that widespread knowledge of the existence of Arthur's grave was not able to completely eliminate the possibility of his return, Malory's description of Lancelot discovering Arthur in his grave (3.1256; XXI:11) did little to affect Malory's ambiguous treatment of Arthur's death. The fictional fact of Lancelot's discovery, with all its contradictory reverberations, is allowed for by virtue of Malory's generic positioning; he may be writing in a chronicle style, but his text is fully fictional, and therefore such overdetermination is allowed for precisely because his text-world need not correspond with the logic of any actual or possible world beyond it, and indeed, its internal folklore need not be developed in any complete or even coherent form. But while Malory turns the *real* into fiction in Arthur's final scene by creating an internal folklore that, in maintaining the ambiguity of Arthur's death, mimics over 300 years of chronicle tradition, the autonomous construction of his text-world also allows him to leave Arthur where Lancelot found him—in his grave. The tragedy of civil strife, one of Malory's most urgent themes, has reached its greatest point of destruction: the king, it seems, is dead, and from this point on "such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs" (3.1184; XX:9).

Thus, while histories incorporated legendary materials that, by virtue of their textualization, became more *real* than the actual-world legends themselves, romance authors from Chrétien to Malory, operating in a matrix of oral lore, known physical remnants, and competing authorized histories, could take advantage of the complexities and inconsistencies in earlier texts by turning such simulacra into fictional facts. This chapter has attempted to trace the discursive use of Avalon from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Malory in order to show not only the uniqueness of its eruptions in culturally and politically specific moments, but also how the specificities of these manifestations accumulate in complex imaginative networks that never foreclose one tradition by introducing another. It has sought to provide an analysis of the ways fictional and nonfictional texts interplay with each other within these networks, and how such interaction is neither consistently chronological, nor a straightforward adoption of historical elements into romance. As a fairy motif that is (at least) constructed to have deep roots in folkloric culture, Avalon emerges in such a reading as a culturally entrenched motif that brings its multifarious past with it in each textual appearance—a past that can be drawn upon and manipulated by the authors of these texts to serve their narrative needs. The final two chapters of this book will further consider the ways romance authors situate their texts within these imaginative networks, and, in constructing unique text-worlds in which fairies are imagined to fulfill specific narrative functions, how each author develops an internal folklore for his romance that distances itself from, and simultaneously builds upon, an accumulating matrix of fairy conventions, motifs, and ideas.

CHAPTER 3

BEYOND ORTHODOXY: TESTS AND QUESTS

*Of destinés derf and dere
What may mon do bot fonde?*

—*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (564–65)

The Avalon motif stands at the heart of a romance tradition of fairy rewards, where knights of exceptional martial prowess and chivalric virtue receive the gifts of a fairy mistress, and where some are taken to enjoy the delights of the fairy realm at the end of a celebrated career. Such a tradition of what we might tentatively call fairy wish-fulfillment will be the subject of the final chapter, but first, since fairy gifts are no ordinary gifts, that is, since they nearly always hold the potential to be as much a curse as a reward, it will be necessary to consider those fairies who (at least initially) appear to function in nearly the opposite role. These other fairy figures, the dangerous fairies of romance, exist within the same complex matrix of imaginative conventions and motifs as the fairies of wish-fulfillment, and in most cases the two hold the potential—at least for a time—to turn into the other, but these dangerous fairies can be distinguished from the fairies of wish-fulfillment in that rather than primarily functioning to reward knightly virtue, they instead work to challenge it, and through this testing process, emerge as what we might call *embodied events* within the world of their texts. That is, they operate as figures whose central narrative purpose is to serve as the challenge against which these knights can test and define their knighthood. Indeed, as this chapter will argue, such fairies are ideal figures for tests of this sort. Their ultimate freedom from moral constraints, combined with their propensity for arbitrary or illogical behavior, and, most visibly, their unmatched supernatural powers, make them dangerous beyond the normal—dangerous in ways that other adversaries, such as rival knights, opposing armies, or even giants and dragons, are not. Above all, the characteristic that separates such dangerous fairies from these other

opponents, under which all these qualities are subsumed, is the element of the unknown—the unexplained and the uncanny—and it is this fundamental difference from the more “ordinary” adversaries of romance that makes fairies ideal figures for challenging the heroes they confront.

In the world of romance, moreover, such adversaries are extremely important. As encapsulated in the quotation from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it is one of the principal vocations of the knight to seek out the unknown and embrace such tests, and it is this ethos of adventure, of challenges sought, met, and (typically) overcome, that serves as the principal driving force of romance narrative, and is in many ways the primary identifying characteristic of the genre. Creating such adventures, however, requires opponents or tests formidable enough to challenge even the best of knights, and for this, fairies, with all their Otherworldly powers and associations, prove especially useful. This chapter examines the unique ways in which fairies take on these challenging or testing roles. In borrowing from Giorgio Agamben’s recent theorizations of sovereign power, it develops a reading in which these dangerous fairies, as *adoxic* figures (existing outside the traditional categories of orthodox and unorthodox), generate intra-narrative “states of exception.”¹ Within such states, it will be argued, these fairies function as embodied devices who, through their strange and arbitrary violence, work to challenge knights on physical, psychological, and moral levels, and who, in turn, become integral to the central ideological concerns of their texts.

Supernatural Power and the Sovereign Ban

Finding challenges for romance heroes was no small task. Knights represent the best humanity has to offer, and romances largely deal with only the elite of this group. Chaucer refers to his hero Sir Thopas as “the flour / Of roial chivalry” (7.901–2), a stock expression used widely in romance to denote the pinnacle of knighthood, and used by Chaucer here, in his virtuoso reconstruction of generic conventions and motifs, to place his hero at the top of the roll-call of named knights in “romances of prys” (above “Horn child,” “Ypotys,” “Beves,” “Sir Gy,” “Sir Lybeux,” and “Pleyndamour,” 7.898–900), illustrating how conventional it was for authors to make their heroes the best of all knights, not just within the text-worlds of their own romances, but also within the broader imaginative networks in which these

romances circulated.² A problem inherent in making such peerless characters the heroes of their romances, however, is that authors had to become increasingly inventive to find opponents, or tasks, daunting enough to adequately challenge them. A number of solutions arose. One was, simply, to multiply the number of opponents a knight had to face at once, or in quick succession. Another was, through masking identities, to have a knight face another of equal valor from his own court. Also, giants or monstrous men, on account of their sheer size and physical force, could cause sufficient problems for the hero. Magic, too, could be used against the hero, making battle with a lesser knight (or a relatively simple task) exponentially difficult. And, quite apart from encountering magic, quests after enchanted or mystical objects (namely the Holy Grail) could prove difficult, even impossible, for even the best of knights.³

Episodes involving these scenarios appear time and again across the whole of romance, but such a sustained regularity inevitably lead to an accruing predictability; since romances typically insist on their heroes being of the highest knightly stature—the “floure of Chyvalrye”—and since romances are so self-consciously *about* adventure, authors were always in need of new and inventive ways to make the tests challenging, to place their heroes in *real* danger—to keep the expected adventures exciting. The ambiguous supernatural was especially useful in this regard. With the more “ordinary” adversaries of romance, originating from and existing within the human worlds of their texts, the rules of engagement are generally clear, and what exactly the hero or heroine must do in order to achieve victory (even when that victory is simply self-preservation) is nearly always self-evident. That is, based on the interplay of implicit and explicit fictional facts and the phenomenology of filling “gaps” in a text-world according to the principle of minimal departure, the human worlds constructed by the authors of these romances will necessarily correspond, at least in certain fundamental ways, with the actual or imagined experiences of the intended audience, most often taking the form of intra-generic or at least intertextual correspondence. But fairies, due to their origin in the supernatural alternative worlds within their romances’ text-worlds, are never predictable at either intra- or extra-narrative levels. Indeed, it could be said that the principal generic expectation of fairies is to behave unexpectedly, and such uniqueness is related to the fact that, while these alternative worlds do indeed develop intra-generic and intertextual correspondence across texts,

their resistance to any sense of an accruing predictability lies in the persistent singularity of their exception from the logical norms of the human world (both within the narrative and beyond). In other words, the generic niche of the alternative worlds in romance is primarily characterized by the *unknowableness* of such realms—a quality, generated by the arbitrary decisions of the supernatural figures who occupy them, that is imagined uniquely within each text.

It may be useful in this context to think of such supernatural realms as “states of exception,” where fairies, as adoxic figures, create *anomic* Otherworldly spaces—that is, intra-diegetic spaces free from the logical, physical, and moral structures inherent in the human worlds of their texts. According to Giorgio Agamben, the state of exception does not constitute the chaos that precedes or necessarily excludes order, but rather it is “the situation that results from [that order’s] suspension.”⁴ In other words, the exception is that which is taken outside (*ex-capere*) the general rule; it is that which cannot be subsumed into the norm, but yet may still have a distinct and recognizable shape. For Agamben, of course, this is a strictly political concept (or one envisaged in strictly political terms), where the “general rule” is the law, and where the state of exception is that space of juridical anomie that is decided on by the sovereign.⁵ The sovereign, therefore, is at the same time paradoxically inside and outside the law. For if the sovereign is the one who, within the juridical order, has the power to proclaim the state of exception, which suspends the order’s own validity, then he thus stands outside the juridical order and nevertheless belongs to it.⁶ In this juridico-political context the sovereign assumes a tremendous amount of power, becoming something akin to a “living law”—*lex animate*—except that he operates, not strictly outside the law, but without law, and the state of exception therefore becomes an anomic space with the force of law without law—a space where there is no recognizable rule of law, but yet there is still an arbitrary force with the power of law.⁷ Considering this, I would like to suggest that fairies, as adoxic figures of sovereign power existing neither inside nor outside established orthodoxies, create similar states of exception within the worlds of their texts, where the law—the general rules of the human world—is no longer in force, and where these fairies generate and constitute their own arbitrary “non-law” (the force of law that is not law) that takes its place. Through such a reading, I would like to imagine a new intra-diegetic context for Agamben’s theories on the

state of exception, and suggest how these states contribute to the unique ways fairies test and challenge humans in romance.

The early fourteenth-century *Sir Orfeo* betrays in vivid detail the way fairies can assume this sort of sovereign power within their text-worlds, and how the spaces surrounding them—the alternative possible worlds they occupy—can come to take on characteristics of the state of exception. Without explanation or apparent motivation the Fairy King appears to Heurodis (while sleeping under an “ympe-tre” in her orchard) in a dream.⁸ In the dream he shows her his realm and afterwards gives the instructions that she is to return to the same orchard the next day where he will take her back to his realm in person, and when Heurodis awakes,

Sche crid, & lopli bere gan make:
Sche froted hir honden & hir fet,
& crached hir visage—it bled wete;
Hir riche robe hye al to-rett,
& was reueyd out of hir witt. (78–82)

The agony resulting from Heurodis’s encounter with the Fairy King comes suddenly—“as sone as sche gan awake” (77)—and is all the more shocking in contrast to the tranquil orchard scene in which she slept. More unsettling still is the apparent madness the Fairy King’s encounter provokes, and the bodily harm Heurodis inflicts on herself (with her now-bloody “fingres smale,” 109) is disturbing in ways no attack from an external agent could be. Orfeo, of course, is shocked by her self-mutilation, but he is even more unnerved by the strange psychological transformation he detects: “Allas!” he says, “þi louesom eyȝen to / Lokeþ so man dop on his fo!” (111–12). The Fairy King’s apparently random and terrifying appearance to Heurodis in her dream—a kind of psychological ravishing—coupled with his demand for her body the following day, shows his sovereign power to suspend the rules of the human world he has intruded upon, and through such a suspension, to create in this sphere a state of exception in which Heurodis and (by association) Orfeo are bound to the force of his arbitrary non-law.

If, as Agamben says, the “fundamental activity” of sovereign power is to create the state of exception, then it can also be said that the “original activity” of sovereign power is the “production of a *biopolitical* body.”⁹ For Agamben this body is that of *homo sacer*—the “sacred” man, or man “set apart,” who can be killed but not sacrificed and who is reduced to “bare

life” (pure biological existence, as opposed to any particular way of life) by being inclusively excluded from the sovereign sphere through the “ban.”¹⁰ “He who has been banned,” Agamben says, referring to those figures of bare life who are inclusively excluded (both *out-lawed* and held *within the law*) by the sovereign exception, “is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather abandoned by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, inside and outside, become indistinguishable [. . . the sovereign exception] holds life in its ban by abandoning it.”¹¹ In much the same way, it could be said that the Fairy King holds Heurodis in his ban by demanding she return to the same “ympe-tre” in order to be taken to his realm.¹² She is abandoned, *out-lawed*, expelled from the normal human world, but at the same time, since the Fairy King’s non-law supersedes the general rule of the human world, she is also held *within the law*. In other words, she is *banished*, brought into the supernatural sovereign sphere, under the entirety of the Fairy King’s adoxic exception.¹³

The paradoxical nature of this relation of ban is reflected in the semantic ranges of the Middle English words “abandonen” and “bandoun.”¹⁴ To be “abandoned” (*MED*, abandonen v. 1, from OF abandonner) is to surrender or give oneself up, to yield utterly. And to “ben in (at) bandoun” (*MED*, bandoun n. 1(a), from OF bandon) is to “be in (someone’s) power or under (his) control; be dominated by (sb.); be in bondage.”¹⁵ If Heurodis does not give herself up to the Fairy King, to be taken to “liue wiþ ous euer-mo” (168), as he tells her, then she will nevertheless be snatched away and torn apart:

Ȝif þou makest ous y-let,
 Whar þou be, þou worst y-fet
 & to-tore þine limes al,
 þat noþing help þe no schal. (169–72)

Heurodis must therefore abandon herself to the jurisdiction of the Fairy King’s ban, while at the same time, by holding her in this ban, the Fairy King abandons her to the violent threat of his arbitrary non-law. And it is through this relation of ban that Heurodis is reduced to bare life, a life that can be killed by the fairies with impunity—a life that no longer has significance.

It is from this relation of ban, and the abduction that results from it, that Orfeo's test begins. Indeed, the characteristics of the Fairy King's sovereign power and his intrusion on the human world of the text is developed by the author, not to make a political statement (though its political implications will be considered later in this chapter), but instead to create an internal folklore for his romance in which the Fairy King functions as an event—as a terrifying figural challenge against which Orfeo can prove his worth as both a king and as a husband—the challenge on which the central action of the narrative develops. When Heurodis is abducted in person (the potentiality of the Fairy King's non-law realized as absolute actuality), Orfeo leaves his kingdom in the hands of his steward and ventures into the wilderness to find her.¹⁶ Though not banned himself, he is forced into a certain proximity to the supernatural sovereign sphere in which his wife is caught. After many years, he eventually gains access, “In at a roche” (347), to the Fairy King's underground realm. It is a place he discovers to be beautiful and magnificent—a “fair cuntray, / As briȝt so sonne on somers day” (351–52), with castles and towers so lavishly bedecked “Al of precious stones” (366) that he thinks it is “þe proude court of Paradis” (376). But, as demonstrated by Cassodorien in *Richard Coer de Lion*, along with many such figures, fairy appearances can be misleading, and underneath these idyllic exteriors lay a more sinister side. Indeed, upon entering the Fairy King's castle, Orfeo finds a series of mangled and tortured bodies:

þan he gan bihold about al
& seiȝe ful liggeand wiȝin þe wal
Of folk þat were þider y-brouȝt
& þouȝt dede, & nare nouȝt.
Sum stode wiȝ-outen hade,
& sum non armes nade,
& sum þurth þe the bodi hadde wounde,
& sum lay wode, y-bounde,
& sum armed on hors sete,
& sum astrangled as þai ete;
& sum were in water adreint,
& sum wiȝ fire al for-schreynt.
Wiues þer lay on child-bedde,
Sum ded and sum awedde. (387–400)

All the people in this collection have been, like Heurodis, caught in the Fairy King's adoxic sovereign sphere; they have been abducted, "Wip fairi bider y-come" (404), and *banished* to their ambiguous frozen states under the entirety of the Fairy King's non-law. As prisoners on the brink of death, who are "pou3t dede, & nare nou3t," they have become living corpses, abjections surviving in some terrifying state of suspended existence.¹⁷ In Agamben's terms they represent "limit-figures of life"; they are bodies that have been produced as bare life—bodies that have, in ways more literal than Agamben imagines, "entered into an intimate symbiosis with death without, nevertheless, belonging to the world of the deceased."¹⁸

This actualization of the potentiality of the Fairy King's ban, of the supernatural production of bare life imagined at its limit, makes earlier descriptions of the fairy realm's magnificence and beauty eerily disturbing, and such inexplicability, such *unheimliche* strangeness, serves as a profoundly grotesque strategy for illuminating the dangers of Orfeo's quest for his wife.¹⁹ The Fairy King, it may be said, is a terrible beauty, the ruler of an Otherworld realm that is simultaneously defined, as Neil Cartlidge suggests, by its "beautiful courtesy and insouciant cruelty"; and the terrifying illogicality of this collection, the lack of fictional facts necessary to explain why the Fairy King would keep these people in such tortured states (combined with the seemingly contradictory fictional facts of the beauty of the fairies and their realm) suggests something of the characteristic arbitrariness of the sovereign exception, of the latent horror of unmotivated sadism.²⁰ Indeed, it seems this fairy realm is a place where the ordinary rules do not apply, where the logical laws that govern the normal world of the text give way to the liminal and strange, the non-law of the supernatural exception. Orfeo's quest for his abducted wife leads him to a place where the abject, that which opposes humanity, is unavoidably present, enumerated in the anaphoric construction of lines 391–400. In Kristevan terms it is that sort of substance that traumatically shows us our own death. It is "death infecting life," a physical manifestation of the ambiguous, of that which disturbs identity, system, order—of that which does not respect the rules of the ordinary human world.²¹ But what is perhaps most unnerving here is not the presentation of the abject, but rather the inexplicability of the Fairy King's motivations and intentions for keeping such abjections. Ultimately, the unease of this fairy realm is

produced through leaving certain things unexplained—with a very real sense that they are in fact inexplicable. Orfeo's quest insists that he must face this unknown. He must negotiate a realm where the danger lies not in some physical test, or a battle with some formidable opponent, but rather in something altogether more terrifying: the unknowableness of all he has encountered—the arbitrariness of the Fairy King's sovereign ban.

Similarly frightening stories of fairy abduction were not uncommon in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the *Orfeo* story probably picked up resonances not only through its classical antecedents, but also through similar Otherworld accounts circulating in chronicles and miracle stories, and, presumably, in oral tradition as well.²² Walter Map, for example, in his thirteenth-century *De Nugis Curialium*, gives an account of King Herla, a tale widely popular around the court of Henry II. In Map's account Herla encountered a little man (*pigmeus uidebatur modicitate stature*) with a fiery red visage (*ardenti facie*) and red beard (*barba rubente*) who led him to a beautiful underground realm, and after a lavish feast, left him with a small dog that held the marvelous property that Herla and his retinue could not dismount from their horses until the dog jumped from Herla's lap. Herla then returned from the underground realm, but instead of being gone three days, as he had thought, he learned he had been gone for 200 years, and when some of his company, forgetting the little red man's injunction, alighted down from their horses, they immediately fell into dust. The story holds that the dog never does leap down from Herla's lap, and he and his troops are forced to continue their eternal wanderings.²³

Like the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo*, the little red man in this account is an ambiguous figure whose activities are, at an intra-narrative level, completely arbitrary. And also like the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo*, his realm is magnificently beautiful, his mansion being “honestam per omnia qualem Naso regiam describit Solis” [as comely in every part as the palace of the sun described by Naso].²⁴ But beneath this beauty, too, lies something far more ominous. For why this little red man would banish Herla, like the collection of tortured bodies in *Sir Orfeo*, to a state fixed between the living and the dead, fated to an existence of incessant and meaningless wandering, is completely unexplained. But it is precisely this inexplicability of the little red man's supernatural ban, this sense of arbitrariness in the seeming cruelty of his exception, that makes his behavior all the more disturbing. As

there is no rationalization at the end of this story, or any explicit indication of its moral purpose, it seems Map designed this story specifically to resist interpretation, as if to suggest in this instance that the adoxic, and the enigmas governing it, is precisely that which defies traditional modes of exegesis, that which cannot be subsumed into the logic of the normal human world.²⁵

Another adoxic figure of this sort, an altogether more frightening little red man, appears in Thomas Walsingham's late-fourteenth-century *Chronica Maiora*.²⁶ As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, this little red man (*homunculus rubeus*) appears to a boy in a field of wheat, and

appropinquans arripuit frenum ejus, et, vellet nollet, duxit eum in siliginem, ad locum ubi, ut sibi visum fuit, pulcherrima domina cum multis puellis sibi similibus residebat; quæ mox jussit eum equo deponi, et pelle carnibusque lacerari; et demum excoriari mandavit. Deinde prædicta domina, caput suum secans per medium, cerebrum, ut putabat, abstulit, caput vacuumque reclusit. Quibus ita gestis, eum levare fecit in equum, et abire dimisit.

[Approaching, [the little red man] took hold of the youth's bridle and pulled him unwillingly through the wheat to a place where the youth could see a most beautiful lady sitting with many similar-looking young girls. She then ordered him to be taken down from his horse and to be lacerated on his skin and fleshy parts, and lastly commanded him to be stripped of his skin. Then the lady, cutting through the middle of his head, as it seemed to him, removed his brain and left his head empty. When this had been done, she caused him to be lifted onto his horse and sent him away.]²⁷

Like the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo* and the little red man in Map's account, this little red man intrudes on the normal world adjacent to which he exists, bringing with him an aura of the unknown and the strange—a certain liminal presence characteristic of his adoxic nature. His abduction of the boy is seemingly random, and his appearance initiates a sequence of increasingly horrific events in this account, troubling not just for their violence, but for their lack of any logical motivation behind that violence. Without a word he seizes the reins of the boy's horse and leads him to the realm of the beautiful lady, but unlike the fairy realm in *Sir Orfeo* or Map's account, the dividing line between the normal landscape and the supernatural sphere is difficult to distinguish, though when it is reached it is unmistakable—it is a place where the normal rules of the human world no longer stand, where nothing is as it seems, and where the arbitrary non-law of the sovereign lady (*domina*) produces the abducted boy as *homo sacer*, as a life that has been caught in the ban of the supernatural sovereign sphere.

Furthermore, like the fairy realm in *Sir Orfeo*, this space exhibits a certain interplay between torture and attraction. As both beautiful and sadistically violent, the beautiful lady is a paradox of signification, and it is precisely this attractiveness, this seemingly idyllic aura, that heightens the discomfiture of the surgery to follow. Before the surgery, though, she calls for the boy to be tortured, and again norms are disrupted—the beautiful young girls who should be associated with innocence become agents of extreme violence. The girls lacerate his flesh and strip his skin, and afterward the lady splits open his head and removes his brain. Then, the surgery completed, the lady puts the boy back on his horse and sends him on his way, as if she had no overarching intention in tormenting him, no eventual goal in mind. It appears, indeed, to be simply torture for the sake of torture.

The account of the surgery is unlike any other in our extant sources, and though it functions primarily as a means of torture, it seems to show some awareness of what was understood about human physiology at the time.²⁸ However, even if the lady's vivisection could have been considered a legitimate medical procedure, her removal of the boy's brain was certainly not, and in the end it becomes clear things have gone terribly wrong. The operation leaves the boy in a maddened state, as, immediately after being sent away, "expers et inops ingenii coepit furere, et furiosos gestus continuare" [deprived of his wits and not in control of his senses, he began to act wildly and kept making furious gestures].²⁹ He wanders about in this state until he eventually reaches a village where a young girl finds him. She sets out on a quest to have him healed, but it is not until six years later that his sanity is restored (by the same supernatural lady who had previously removed his brain), and all the while it becomes clear that the misery inflicted on him by the lady, much like Heurodis's pain inflicted by the Fairy King, is as much psychological as physical.

Another similar account of supernatural abduction occurs in the story of Richard of Sunderland, a story that appears in a collection of miracles attributed to St. Cuthbert at Farne, probably first written in the late twelfth century though surviving in only one manuscript from the mid-sixteenth.³⁰ The story goes that one day during the reign of Henry II a peasant of North Sunderland, Richard, had gone out to cut reeds for thatching. While alone he encountered three handsome youths who were dressed in green and rode

green horses.³¹ One of these youths, whom Richard supposed to be human (*putabatur homo*), pulled Richard up behind him on his horse and carried him off. The place he came to was very beautiful, with a great mansion, a king, and a vast crowd. When they offered Richard a green drinking horn full of what appeared to be new ale, he decided not to drink because he remembered hearing conversations about the popular opinion (*vulgaris opinio*) of such things.³² They tried to persuade him to remain in their realm, but, after no success, eventually returned him to the spot where he had been originally taken, though as punishment they deprived him of his ability to speak. Later, at the feast of St. Denis, he was brought before holy water where he opened his mouth crying, “Sancte Cuthberte, Sancte Cuthberte!” thus being healed (which was the reason the account was recorded to begin with).³³

In terms of settings and narrative events the story shares many similarities with *Sir Orfeo* and the other chronicle accounts discussed thus far—the sudden (and random) appearance of the mysterious figures; the abduction; the eerily beautiful realm; the harmful consequences of the encounter; the eventual release and recovery—but perhaps most significant here is the ambiguous nature of the supernatural green-clad figures, their unknown relationship with Richard, and their motivations. Like so many accounts of the fairy Otherworld, their realm is idyllic and richly beautiful, but there is also a real danger about it as well, as if the deprivation of Richard’s speech was only a minor affliction compared to what might have happened had he partaken of the green drinking horn he was offered. In the end the story does not have nearly the imaginative impact of *Sir Orfeo* or Walsingham’s account, but it perhaps comes closest in hagiographical writings to creating a similar sense of mystery and narrative suspense through leaving the Otherworld realm as a place of unknowableness, an adoxic place where the human victims are abandoned to the arbitrariness of the supernatural sovereign sphere—a place where danger is ever-present, though how and when it may unfold, and what shape it may take, is left to the imagination.

It is precisely this unknowableness, however, this depiction of arbitrary supernatural power characteristic of adoxic figures, that makes this account of Richard unusual in hagiographical writings, and that also suggests it may have been influenced by (if not derived from) stories circulating in oral

lore.³⁴ Another story that also may have picked up resonances from similar Otherworld accounts circulating in oral tradition is the romance of *Thomas of Erceldoune*, known in its ballad version as *Thomas the Rhymer*. Indeed, as the surviving evidence suggests, the *Thomas* story itself may well have germinated in oral culture, probably localized in and around Erceldoune (modern Earlston), before being recorded in its surviving forms, and, as seems equally probable, would have continued to survive in oral tradition alongside these written forms.³⁵ The romance begins when Thomas, lying on Huntley Banks, is approached by a richly adorned woman of luminous beauty: “Als dose þe sonne on someres daye, / þat faire lady hir selfe scho schone” (47–48).³⁶ He bows in reverence, thinking her to be the Queen of Heaven, but she quickly corrects him, claiming instead to be “of ane oper countree” (“fair Elfland” in the ballad version).³⁷ He requests her love, but she resists: “þou mane, þat ware folye” (101), she says. Despite her warning, though, Thomas persists, and eventually makes love to her (seven times).³⁸ But immediately after her beauty turns grotesquely hideous:

Hir hare it hange all ouer hir hede,
Hir eghne semede owte, þat are were graye.
And all þe riche clothynge was a-waye,
þat he by-fore sawe in þat stede;
Hir a schanke blake, hir oper graye,
And all hir body lyke the lede. (131–36)

Thomas then believes her to be the fiend, and it is at this point that, in telling him he must take leave of “Medill-erthe,” she leads him in at Eildon Hill. This underground passage is an eerie place, “dirke als mydnyght myrke” (171), though in the ballad version it is an altogether more terrifying journey:

For forty days and nights
He wade thro red blude to the knee,
And he saw neither sun nor moon,
But heard the roaring of the sea. (25–28)

Eventually they come to a seemingly idyllic arbor, where Thomas, faint with hunger, wishes to indulge in some of the fruit. But the lady stops him: “Thomas! þou late þame stande,” she says,

Or ells þe fende the will atteynt.
If þou it plokk, sothely to saye,
Thi saule gose to þe fyre of helle. (187–90)

As with the ale offered to Richard of Sunderland and the beverage offered to the Yorkshire countryman in William of Newburgh's account, there is something illogical about this fruit, as the act of eating it bears no obvious correlation with its consequences. It is, as Thomas's journey continues, an illogicality consistent with the realm into which he is led. She insists that when they reach her realm he is to speak to no one but her, and if the king of her realm was to discover the truth of their sexual union she would be "hanged & drawene" (223). Eventually they reach her country, and immediately the lady's appearance returns to its former beauty.³⁹ They then come to a castle, where inside Thomas sees

ladyes come, both fayre & gent,
With Curtassye to hir knelande.
Harpe & fethill bothe þey fande,
Getterne, and als so þe sawtrye;
Lutte and rybybe bothe gangande,
And all manere of mynstralsye. (255–60)

Like similar Otherworld realms, this country betrays a certain courtly beauty and extravagance, but also like other such realms, there is something dangerous about it as well. In addition to the fierceness of its king, Thomas is told that the devil himself regularly comes to carry one of its occupants off to hell, which is the reason the lady takes Thomas back to Huntley Banks.

It is particularly telling that at separate points in the romance Thomas supposes this lady to be both the Virgin Mary and the devil, for while she ultimately proves to be neither, both suppositions seem to be excusable mistakes, as she exhibits qualities of both. Nor is her country either heaven or hell (as evinced by Thomas's vision of the roads to the separate Otherworld realms, 193–220), though it too betrays characteristics of both. It is, however, a place where Thomas—abducted and abandoned to the lady's supernatural sovereign sphere, to the unknowableness of her supernatural non-law—must face hardships and tests. And it is also a place where failure, in the case of the forbidden fruit, results in nothing less than eternal damnation, and in the case of the injunction to silence, must also

result in some ominous punishment, though what exactly the penalty may be is never spelled out.⁴⁰ Quite apart from the dangers of these tests, though, is the terror of the devil's occasional levy, frightening in its illogicality, but also in its inevitability. Like the fairy abductions discussed previously, it is a lottery of the damned, a random and inescapable ravishing, and since there is nothing to be done about it, Thomas must rely on the aid of his lady for help. In the end, therefore, the lady proves more benign than menacing, and, through her gifts of prophecy, her banning of Thomas to her supernatural nonlaw works more for his benefit than harm. Intra-diegetically, however, there are never any such assurances that things will work out as they do, and throughout the romance Thomas has to traverse the supernatural realm, like Orfeo and the figures from the other analogous accounts discussed previously, in fear of the unpredictable and (ultimately) inexplicable dangers of the Otherworld.

Adoxic Tests

Despite Thomas's ability to pass the tests presented to him and endure the dangers of the Otherworld, his ultimate reliance on his lady for deliverance, along with his lack of any ostensible heroic feats, puts his status as a romance hero in question. He neither engages in any of the acts or customs of chivalry, nor does he even wear armor or carry a sword; in effect, as Helen Cooper suggests, he is "singularly lacking in any of the qualities and emotions that normally confer entitlement to heroism."⁴¹ Indeed, the story itself, largely based on this lack of a chivalric protagonist, may be less generically akin to romance than to the accounts of Herla, Walsingham's youth, and Richard of Sunderland, though its treatment of the Otherworldly mistress does help bring it within romance's generic boundaries.⁴² It is, however, more often the case that romances involving Otherworld tests include not only supernatural challenges, but also knights who are willing to embrace such adventures and actively take on the trials of the Otherworld. And underlying this willingness—even eagerness—to engage in these fearsome challenges, to test "destinés derf and dere," in the words of the *Gawain*-Poet, is courage—that quality of the heart that enables a knight to act heroically, to take on such dangerous tasks unflinchingly, a quality that is in many ways one of the essential characteristics of ideal knighthood.

It is, moreover, always the case that the demonstration of courage cannot occur without the potential for fear, and for this reason a tradition of fearsome Otherworldly encounters, both within and beyond romance, proved useful for romance authors as it provided a means of testing, not necessarily a knight's strength of arms, but rather his strength of heart. One romance that tests both, and that plays upon this fear of the Otherworld as a means of challenging (and, eventually, demonstrating) knightly courage, is *Eger and Grime*, a romance surviving only in the Percy Folio and later prints, but first alluded to not long after the compilation of the Thornton manuscript.⁴³ As outlined in [chapter 1](#), the romance follows the adventures of two knights, Eger and Grime, as they venture through the Forbidden Land, a land that is at first presented as fully Otherworldly, but eventually comes to be rationalized in the second half of the romance. This rationalization, though, does little to eliminate any of the eeriness of either half—in fact, it works rather to the opposite effect. In most romances containing alternative worlds, the fictional facts of supernatural figures or events establish internal logics for their text-worlds that signal a departure from the normal rules of the actual world, or from other text-worlds that mimic the structures and organizing principles of the actual world. In *Yvain*, a romance that shares a number of motifs with *Eger and Grime* and that may potentially have been a source (along with its Middle English reworking), this happens early when Colgrevance meets the Giant Herdsman, making later encounters with the supernatural, such as the occurrence at the magic spring, diegetically acceptable—even expected—within the internal folklore of the text.⁴⁴ With Chrétien's quasi-fairy figures, Esclados and Laudine, we expect more and are given less; in *Eger and Grime*, it is just the opposite, and as the exact supernatural status of either Loospaine or Gray Steel is never spelled out, the lack of diegetic saturation generates a certain unease when strange things occur, creating an unsettling effect produced by the overdetermination of the text-world—by the ontological “in-betweenness” of the quasi-supernatural figures—that leaves the audience suspended between possible modes of interpretation.

Added to this underlying discomfiture, too, is a series of episodes involving or resulting from encounters with either Loospaine or Gray Steel that challenge the courage of both Eger and Grime by playing, disturbingly, with issues of identity and the body, with the psychological effects of physical pain and abjection—with the production of bare life at its

supernatural limit. The first of these occurs when Eger returns home after his defeat at the hands of Gray Steel and Grime finds him wounded to the point of death, his body bloodied and mangled with seventeen wounds, seven of which run entirely through him. As once a symbol of his knighthood, his “manhood” (84), his body is now an abjection—mutilated but still living—like one in the Fairy King’s collection in *Sir Orfeo*. And as Eger goes on to recount to Grime how his adventures in the Forbidden Land led him to this state, it becomes clear that he has been subjected to things far more strange, and fearsome, than simple martial defeat. Part of this strangeness lies in Gray Steel’s ambiguous nature. Indeed, much like Loospaine (as discussed in [chapter 1](#)), Gray Steel appears in the first half of the romance very much like a fully supernatural knight. His sudden appearance when Eger first rides into the Forbidden Land, accompanied by his unusual martial prowess and the eerily strange occurrences during and after his battle with Eger, cast him in the light of an Otherworldly challenger. Within the internal folklore of *Eger and Grime*, at least at this point in the romance, he emerges as an embodied event—a figure whose sole purpose is to serve as a challenge against which Eger can test and define his knighthood. Above all, the characteristic that separates Gray Steel from more ordinary human opponents is the element of unknowableness, and it is this characteristically adoxic attribute, with all its strange and uncanny associations, that makes him such an ideal adversary for testing Eger’s chivalry.

The first hint of Gray Steel’s Otherworldliness comes in his sudden and aggressive appearance. Shortly after entering the Forbidden Land, Eger hears in the distance the pounding of Gray Steel’s horse galloping toward him, to which Eger’s steed, serving as a metonym for his knightly ethos, charges ahead all the more fervently. Compared to Gray Steel’s steed Eger’s is “but a fole” (120), but this does not cause Eger to hesitate in the slightest, and the two come together in a brutal clash. A violent and vividly detailed battle ensues, but in the end Gray Steel proves too strong:

I fought soe long, I ffel in swoone,
Till betweene his hands I fell downe. (181–82)

When Eger awakes from this swoon he washes the blood from his eyes and discovers the little finger on his right hand gone, though his glove is still intact. Around him lie corpses similarly dismembered, and the neatness, the

apparent meticulousness, of this symbolic castration seems to stir the imagination far more than simple death would have done. What may be most disturbing about the Forbidden Land is that which is left unexplained, and there is something uncanny about Gray Steel's severing of Eger's finger that brings with it an almost unexplainable surplus of anxiety, whether it be related to castration or not. Indeed, quite apart from castration (though its fears are necessarily included within it) is the inner structure of the ban that characterizes Gray Steel's power in this episode. Eger, at the moment of his slipping into unconsciousness, falls into Gray Steel's hands; he is, in effect, caught in Gray Steel's sovereign sphere and subject to his arbitrary maiming, but it is precisely the arbitrariness of this violence that signals the troubling possibilities of the sovereign decision. It is a characteristic of this state of exception that *everything is possible*; where, it may be said, questions concerning ethics or appropriate chivalric conduct in the Forbidden Land simply make no sense, as the law, the rules of the normal human world, along with the ethical structures supporting it, does not apply. Eger (unlike the corpses around him) is kept barely alive, produced as *homo sacer* in a space where Gray Steel's non-law is characterized by his power, and impetus, to whimsically dismember and kill. For Eger, therefore, the missing little finger symbolizes, not necessarily castration, but rather a more substantial degeneration; it is a permanent reminder of his embodied abjection, of his reduction to a life that can be killed with impunity, of his reduction to bare life.

A further episode in Eger's adventures that recalls his degenerated status is the reopening of his wounds on his return from the Forbidden Land. When Eger finds his way to Loospaine's bower she gives him a "grasse greene" drink (291), and as soon as he partakes of the green elixir it fills his wounds from the inside out and he is healed completely. But this healing, as mentioned in [chapter 1](#), comes with a taboo. For when Eger, after leaving Loospaine, gets within a mile from home, all his wounds reopen in excruciating pain—"As kniues had been beaten thorow my bones" (340)—and he falls unconscious in a swoon. In ways reminiscent of the description of mangled bodies in *Sir Orfeo*, or the painful surgery in Walsingham's account of the little red man, this grisly detail may be in many ways the most profoundly horrific event in the romance. In an abrupt reversal of his marvelous healing, his body once again becomes a mangled abjection, but instead of being wounded by Sir Gray Steel's lance or sword (which

somehow seems far less disturbing), this time it occurs from within. As with Eger's severed finger it is difficult to pinpoint exactly why this event stirs so much unease, but it is in some way related to the uncanny manipulation of Eger's body, to the way he has become a "limit-figure of life" (reflected in the wounds that bring his body in proximity to death), unable to escape his capture within the ban of the supernatural exception.

The news of these strange and terrible events does not come lightly to Grime, but he nevertheless vows to avenge Eger's loss. He rides into the Forbidden Land in Eger's stead, where, on the night before his battle with Gray Steel, Loospaine tells him of a further aspect of Gray Steel's strangeness:

for euerye houre from Midnight till noone,
eche hower he increaseth the strenght of a man;
& euery houer from Noone till Midnight,
euery hower he batheth the strenght of a Knight.⁴⁵ (891–94)

Grime could have used this information to his advantage, but because he has "noe cause to doe soe" (943), that is, because facing Gray Steel when he is not at his strongest would be to shirk a challenge, Grime rides out to battle when Gray Steel is at his strongest—at the height of the day. The ensuing battle is long and bloody:

These Noble burnes in battele
Hacked & hewed with Swords of Mettle. (1023–24)

But in the end Grime

With an arkeward stroke full sore
Through Liuer & longs Gray steele he bore. (1055–56)

Furthermore, to emphasize the fierceness of the contest, the two steeds are again used as metonyms for their owners, for when Grime looks over after the battle he sees their steeds "fighting as they had done" (1100). In the end, the Otherworldly aura that envelops the Forbidden Land and that allows for such unusual incidents makes both Eger's and Grime's battles with Gray Steel all the more fearsome, through which the courage of both knights, demonstrated in their unflinching heroics in the face of such a challenger, emerges as all the more robust. As with other such adoxic realms, that

which is most disturbing about the Forbidden Land is precisely that which cannot be understood according to the logic of the human world, and Eger and Grime must face the adventures that befall them despite not knowing exactly what kind of *unheimliche* forces they are up against.

But much like Loospaine, Gray Steel appears to be more human than fairy in the “Adventures of Grime.” Instead of a sudden and unexpected appearance, as we find in the “Adventures of Eger,” we learn that the guards on Gray Steel’s castle wall spot Grime’s approach, and eventually help Gray Steel arm for the ensuing battle. After the battle, moreover, his attendants weep at the death of their Lord, and as with Loospaine, this integration of Gray Steel into a social network hints at the notion that he may be human after all. Indeed, that Gray Steel is truly human is confirmed by the fact of his death, and in this we begin to see the reasons for Gray Steel’s, and Loospaine’s, ambiguous representations throughout the romance. Supernatural knights, with all their strange and mysterious associations, are ideal figures for testing knightly courage, but since a human knight could never defeat a fully supernatural challenger in battle, human adversaries are necessary for demonstrating the hero’s martial prowess. Indeed, it is true that strength of heart is an important knightly virtue in *Eger and Grime*, but so is strength of arms.

The conditions of the narrative, moreover, call for both Gray Steel’s Otherworldly and human representations. Gray Steel must appear to be fully supernatural in the first half of the romance in order to excuse Eger’s loss and account for his degrading bodily abjection (it is, after all, not possible to effect a release from the powers of the sovereign ban externally), but in the second half, he must ultimately prove to be human (a fictional fact in accordance with the eventual evaporation of the structure of the ban) so that he can be defeated by Grime, and thus so that Eger can appear to be victorious in front of Winglayne, his original beloved.⁴⁶ There are related narrative advantages in Loospaine’s dual treatment as well. Aside from the imaginative benefits in having a fairy mistress capable of mysterious and marvelous healing, Loospaine, in the “Adventures of Eger,” must heal Eger in order for him to make it from the Forbidden Land to his home alive. But it is also necessary for Eger to be in a defeated state when he returns to Grime, and for this the arbitrary fairy taboo proves to be a particularly effective narrative device. In the “Adventures of Grime,” however, Loospaine must lose these Otherworldly associations in order for

Grime to avenge her in defeating Gray Steel, and therefore so that Grime, through knightly deeds, can have an heiress to win as his bride. Thus, in light of such a reading, the poet of *Eger and Grime* emerges as an author who carefully constructed his narrative and developed a complex (and ultimately incomplete) internal folklore that allowed him the best of both the human and fairy worlds. He created a possible world in which Loospaine and Gray Steel serve as events, as embodied devices used in all their conflicting associations to highlight the chivalric qualities of his two heroes.

As *Eger and Grime* reveals, the shame of defeat and the terror of bodily injury and mutilation emerge in romance as two of the central fears against which chivalric courage stands. An analogue to *Eger and Grime*, Walter Map's story of *Sadius and Galo*, plays upon these fears to interrogate the nature of courage and the dynamics of chivalric virtue. The tale is Map's most elaborate narrative in his *De Nugis Curialium* and, like the miracle story of Richard of Sunderland and the romance of *Thomas of Erceldoune*, it bends generic conventions, taking on characteristics of romance, history, folktale, and anecdote.⁴⁷ The story begins, much like *Eger and Grime*, with a retrospective account of one knight's defeat (here Galo) at the hands of a mysterious giant guarding a supernatural mistress. One day, as Galo relates, his horse led him into a remote region where he eventually came to a town of wondrous splendor and beauty. The place was vacant save for a beautiful maiden seated alone on a silken carpet. Galo approached and called to her, but she would not answer, or even move. He then attempted to force himself on her, but she called out for Rivius, a giant of a size never before seen and with eyes like blazing torches. Without a word this giant attacked Galo, who knew he would surely die without help. Soon, however, another young girl came and fell before the maiden's feet, begging for a year's respite for Galo. The maiden responded by kicking the young girl in the mouth, but eventually Rivius, hearing the girl's entreaties, ceased his attack on Galo and agreed to the year's reprieve. Given this furlough, Galo is left free to return to his court, but at the same time, he is also marked for death, produced as a "limit-figure of life" who is banished to the random non-law of the apparently supernatural giant and the strangely silent but violent maiden. The lack of diegetic saturation, of fictional facts necessary to construct the intra-world logic of the text, or indeed to deduce any rational motivation behind the actions of these apparently adoxic figures, creates an

eerie effect that heightens the unease, the fear, of the supernatural sovereign sphere in which Galo is now bound. The unknowableness of this episode, characteristic of its incomplete internal folklore and generated in part by the random events that constitute this occurrence and in part by the arbitrary precision of the ban in which Galo is caught, suggests something of the dangers of his predicament, of his impending and inevitable reunion with the strange and ostensibly dangerous adoxic figures.

To Galo's shame he is forced to relate this defeat to the court, and also to admit his fear of the giant knight who will soon come to do battle with him once again. However, Galo's friend Sadius, though he believes Galo's marvelous story, does not believe Galo is really afraid:

Credibile satis est quod in omni narratione quam extorsit regina uerax es, excepta confessione timiditatis, que numquam in cor tuum ascendit.

[I can believe that in all the story which the queen wrung from you you spoke the truth, except in your confession of fear, a thing which never came into your heart.]⁴⁸

Since Galo claimed to be against the battle, though, Sadius secretly offers to wear Galo's armor and avenge his loss. But in an inverse of the *Eger and Grime* narrative, and as a way of demonstrating Galo's courageousness, they decide on the opposite: Galo dons Sadius's armor and, in the presence of the court, defeats the mysterious giant knight in a lengthy battle. Sadius, therefore, is declared the champion, but victory (and renown) are restored to Galo as the identity of the true hero is revealed by a wound on his face he received in battle. It is, in the end, a story of heroism at its deepest level, where Galo's courage, and, in effect, his knighthood, is at first put into question by his loss to, and apparent fear of, an imposing Otherworldly opponent. But, when he eventually redeems himself, he does so without a mind for public display, without any concern for redressing his prior disgrace—and for that his knighthood, his inner courageousness, emerges all the more genuine.

Another aspect of this story worth mentioning is that it provides a good example of an earlier version of the *Eger and Grime* plot derived (if we believe Map) from oral tradition.⁴⁹ This is not to suggest that Map would have necessarily reproduced the oral version in its original form, or even that Map's story must be a source for the versions of *Eger and Grime* now extant, but rather to illustrate how, as the correlations between the

romances, chronicle accounts, and miracle stories discussed previously suggest, Otherworld stories, figures, and motifs circulating in these oral/literate cultures could be sustained through time and picked up, altered, and recast to fit the needs of romance authors. Furthermore, there may be any number of derivatives or intermediary versions of this story between Map's tale and the versions of *Eger and Grime* we now have, and it seems likely that a story sustained from the twelfth through the fifteenth century also picked up and amalgamated other motifs and episodes circulating in oral and manuscript form. One further example of this comes from Gervase of Tilbury, a contemporary of Map whose *Otia Imperialia* includes a "widely attested report" (*uulgo testatur*) concerning a supernatural giant knight who emerges to take on challengers at a certain place just outside Wandlebury near Cambridge.⁵⁰ The story, which Gervase had the locals recount to him (*indigenis auditui meo subieci*), is of one Osbert Fitz Hugh, a knight who, upon coming to Wandlebury, hears of this occurrence and decides to take up the challenge.⁵¹ He then rides out to that place alone and shouts "Let a knight come against a knight!" (*miles contra militem ueniat!*), and at the sound of his voice "a knight, or something like a knight" (*miles, aut instar militis*) appears. They joust, and Osbert fells his opponent, though not before receiving a spear wound in his thigh. The mysterious knight vanishes and all the townspeople flock to hear of the event. But Osbert, though victorious, retained a permanent token of his encounter: every year, at the exact moment of the night when this joust took place, his wound would break open afresh, even though it had previously healed over.

There are a number of correlations between this account and Eger's encounter with Sir Gray Steel, not least the grisly detail of the reopening of both Eger's and Osbert's wounds after they had healed. But what links this account closely with *Eger and Grime* is the nature of the Otherworldly challenge and the reaction to that challenge by Osbert. Why, for instance, would Osbert take up this test? Much like Eger riding forth in search of adventure for no other reason than to find adventure, Osbert, it seems, undertakes this challenge because it is a challenge to be undertaken, with no ostensible gain or reward behind it, other than renown. And much like Gray Steel, this supernatural knight functions solely as an event in this account, as a chivalric test. Indeed, it is a challenge between two knights, but also, because of the mysteriousness and apparent adoxic powers of the opposing giant knight, it is a trial by what is contrary, a demonstration of courage

against the unknown, where Osbert, alone and in the dark, must summon the supernatural challenger without knowing precisely what sort of strange dangers await.

This testing of that which is “derf and dere,” however, need not always emerge out of seeking adventures for adventures’ sake. In *Amadas et Ydoine*, composed around the same time Walter Map and Gervase of Tilbury recorded their accounts, Amadas engages in a battle with an Otherworldly knight for a very real and tangible purpose—for the body of his beloved Ydoine. The encounter, the narrator tells us, is both a marvel and an adventure, a chance for Amadas to demonstrate his courage, to show whether he has a “bold heart” (*cuer hardi*, 5594). As discussed in [chapter 1](#), the opposing knight is not the devil, as Amadas initially believes, but he is nevertheless an opponent both dangerous and fearsome, frightening not only for his physical size and Otherworldly powers, but also for the sense of arbitrariness behind his actions—as if his violence follows no knowable rationale. In the events leading up to this encounter he abducts Ydoine and places on her finger an invisible ring that makes her appear to die, a ring that both represents and brings about his control over her body, that both symbolizes and effects his capture of Ydoine in his adoxic sovereign sphere. In a random act of supernatural abduction Ydoine is therefore produced as *homo sacer*, reduced to a life stripped of all significance, a life that literally becomes indistinguishable from death. As with the author of *Sir Orfeo*, who depicts Heurodis imprisoned in suspended animation amid the terrors of the Fairy King’s castle, the author of this romance literalizes the “intimate symbiosis with death”—characteristic of the *abandoned being*—that can only be figurative in the actual world, or in possible worlds mimicking human worlds. It is the nature of the adoxic exception to allow for this intra-world literalization of such extreme conditions or states of being, but it is precisely this literalization, too, that enables its useful function in romance, as it allows for the possibility of a concrete, recognizable and immediate recovery from the supernatural sovereign ban—a recovery that can be effected by a knight to bring about the romance’s happy conclusion.

Indeed, while this recovery may be something near a generic necessity in romance, its machinations are never diegetically perfunctory or even straightforward, and such complications work to constitute the test through which this recovery is enacted, the test to which the narrative’s plot builds.

This is precisely what happens in *Amadas et Ydoine*. While Amadas guards Ydoine's grave alone at night (he himself, like Orfeo, brought into a certain proximity to the supernatural sovereign sphere to which his beloved is banned), the supernatural knight appears suddenly and unexpectedly in a bold display, bounding high over the cemetery wall on his charger. He then approaches Amadas and asks him why he is there, to which Amadas replies, "I am a knight" (*ja sui uns cevaliers*, 5689). It is a statement not only of martial or social status, but also of a certain chivalric ethos, of an inner boldness and strength of heart, and when he is told to leave Ydoine's grave he replies defiantly: "I fear you no more than you do me" (*Ne vous douc ne que faites moi*, 5696). The ensuing battle is long and bloody, and in the ebb and flow of the fighting Amadas finds himself nearly defeated. But when asked to admit defeat he feels a great anguish in his heart:

Lors li revient por la grant ire
Force, vigneurs et vasselage
Et hardement et bon corage. (6284–86)

[Then force, power and chivalry, boldness and courage returned to him from his great distress.]

He then redoubles his efforts, and in a "great surge of boldness" (*grant esfors de hardement*, 6300) he strikes the finishing blow:

Li caus s'en vient sor le blaxon,
Pié et demi en trencie et fent;
Sour le braç destre li descent
Li brans, si li fait un tel merc
Par mi la maille dou hauberc
Que l'espee o trestout le poing
Li fait voler u camp bien loing. (6320–26)

[The sword came down on his shield and cut off a foot and a half; then it hit his right arm, cutting right through the hauberk, and sent his fist, still grasping the sword, flying across the field.]

There is no need to ignore the physical aspects of this battle; Amadas's test requires brute "force" and "vigneurs," along with skill in swordplay. But beyond that, it is a test of his inner knightly qualities, his "vassalage," "hardement," and "corage"—attributes that the supernatural knight, once defeated, recognizes as being among Amadas's most important virtues as a "bons chevaliers" (6354). It is precisely this fact of Amadas's knightly excellence, though, that makes his adoxic opponent necessary. With all his

supernatural powers, coupled with his unexpected and unpredictable behavior, he holds the capacity for being extremely dangerous, and it is this danger, this potential for fear, that proves especially useful for testing Amadas's inner qualities, for demonstrating his courage in the initial confrontation and his boldness during the ensuing battle—qualities necessary for Ydoine's (and by association Amadas's) recovery from the adoxic knight's supernatural exception.

It is occasionally the case, however, that there need not be a physical battle to test a knight's inner resolve. At the one point in *Sir Orfeo* when a battle seems most likely, when Heurodis is to be taken by the Fairy King, Orfeo arms himself and his knights in expectation—

& Orfeo haþ his armes y-nome,
& wele ten hundred kni3tes wiþ him,
Ich y-armed, stout & grim . . .
þai made scheltrom in ich a side,
& sayd þai wold þere abide
& dye þer euerichon,
Er þe quen schuld fram hem gon. (182–90)

—but the fairies snatch her away amid the host (“Wiþ fairi forþ y-nome,” 193), and Orfeo and his men never get the chance to test their mettle. Orfeo, then, takes leave of his court and commits himself to wandering the wilderness in search of his wife. Much like Amadas waiting nightly over the grave of his beloved, Orfeo is brought, through this search, into proximity to the adoxic exception, and his body degenerates accordingly:

Al his bodi was oway duine
For missays, and al to-chine.
Lord! Who may telle þe sore
þis king sufferd ten 3ere & more? (261–64)

Ernst Kantorowicz has argued that the medieval sovereign has two bodies, one natural, the other “mystical”—the “body politic”—and while one is subject to the infirmities of nature or accident, the other is eternal, consisting of territory and government and maintaining within itself the perpetuity of *dignitas*.⁵² Agamben, however, locates a “more uncertain zone” in the political theology of the Middle Ages in which the “body of the king seemed to approximate—and even to become indistinguishable

from—the body of *homo sacer*.”⁵³ What combines the two bodies into a single paradigm is, for Agamben, the fact that in each case bare life has been separated from its context; both the sovereign and the sacred man in a sense survive their own deaths, and for this very reason they both become incompatible with the world of men.⁵⁴ It is from this troubling of Kantorowicz’s distinction that Ruth Evans develops her reading of Orfeo as the exiled king who becomes “the very figure of *homo sacer*,” for while Orfeo is reduced to a “wroche” (333) who longs for death (“why nil dep now me slo?” 332), and who must “digge & wrote” (255) in the ground for his food, he nevertheless maintains his skill in harping, “the poem’s chief signifier of culture,” a skill he eventually uses to win back his wife and in effect assert, as Evans argues, “Le roi ne meurt jamais.”⁵⁵

I would suggest, however, that Orfeo’s abdication, self-exile, and staging of his own death (535–41) need not be read primarily as a dramatization of the “process whereby sovereignty constitutes itself as a political category and the extent to which it is bound to bare life,” as Evans asserts, but perhaps more significantly, as a strategy through which the *Orfeo*-Poet can show the hero-king’s decline and recovery in the working out of the narrative’s arc. Indeed, the imagining of a king’s recovery, not necessarily from bare life (as he himself is not directly subjected to the Fairy King’s ban), but from a chivalric, self-imposed propinquity to his wife’s banishment, would have had a certain political topicality in the wake of the reign of Edward II. That the Auchinleck text (c.1330–40) is the only one to make Orfeo king “In jnglond” (40), to equate Traciens with Winchester (47–50), and to mention a parliament (215–18), indicates something of its potential to be read in light of the political concerns of its first London audience.⁵⁶ In modern criticism, Orfeo has been considered as a *rex inutilis*, a “useless king,” who, because of personal weakness or failure, neglects his political duties.⁵⁷ In this regard he has been equated with Edward II, a “weak willed and frivolous king” who was widely unpopular during the majority of his reign, especially during the summer of 1321, when he was forced to give in to the baronial demand that he banish his two favorites, the Despensers.⁵⁸ Allegedly, however, Edward fraternized with worse than the Despensers. As Higden chronicles:

parvipenso procerum contubernio, adhaesit scurris, cantoribus, tragedis, aurigis, fossoribus, remigibus, navigiis et caeteris artis mechanicae officiis.

[valuing the company of magnates only a little, he consorted with buffoons, singers, actors, carters, diggers, rowers, sailors and other artisans.]⁵⁹

In light of this reputation for indulging in frivolities, *Sir Orfeo* can therefore be read as an imaginative recovery from an English monarch's *rex inutilis* stigma, as it is precisely Orfeo's association with minstrelsy ("Icham a minstrel, lo!" 382) that leads not to his shame, but to the preservation of his *dignitas*, and ultimately to the recovery of his wife. After the reign of Edward II, at a time when "the prestige of the English monarchy had never sunk so low," the imagining of a king who neglects his royal duties for all the right reasons, and who returns having fulfilled his quest to the delight of his kingdom, would have struck a particularly English chord.⁶⁰ But in much the same way that the romance can be read as an imaginative recovery from the shame of a *rex inutilis*, it can also be read as the recovery of the sovereign from exile, even presumed death. "It nis no bot of mannes dep" (552), as Orfeo's steward says when he hears his king is dead, but though Orfeo has been in near proximity to death, he is in fact alive, and the romance's end stages a reunion that is at once both personal and political. Heurodis's body, in this context, becomes a *bio-political* construct, as its capture within the Fairy King's sovereign sphere leads to Orfeo's abdication, and therefore to its integral function within the mechanizations of the English political system. And Orfeo's body, by association, likewise becomes an axis of political focus in the text, as it is the recovery of this body from the wilderness and its reintegration into the political realm that occupies the poem's final 126 lines—a restoration that may well have had a certain political resonance after the events of 1327, when rumors swirled of Edward's survival from his presumed death at the hands of Isabella and Mortimer.⁶¹

The romance's happy ending, however, rests not on some rescue by politically motivated allies, but rather on the singular heroics of Orfeo as he quests after his abducted wife. Orfeo is a "stalworþ man & hardi bo" (41) who undertakes his quest without any of the accoutrements of chivalry (weapons, armor, or horse), though, as it turns out, none of these would have done him any good. He does need his harp, but more importantly he needs his inner qualities of knighthood—his steadfast will and bravery. After ten years of searching the wilderness he eventually sees Heurodis among the fairy train, and in following them underground he must, like

Thomas of Erceldoune, travel through the darkness of the Otherworld. Furthermore, once there, he witnesses the simultaneously beautiful and horrific nature of the fairy realm—full of idyllic pastoral spaces, brilliant castles, and tortured bodies—an *unheimliche* space through which he must negotiate in order to eventually confront the courtly yet terrifyingly violent Fairy King, the figure who captured his wife within the adoxic exception, and who set in motion the events that led to his own exile.

Similar to Orfeo's quest, and to the demonstration of courage his quest necessitates, is the testing of Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Like many of the other adoxic figures already mentioned, the Green Knight's initial intrusion into Arthur's court is both unexpected and terrifying. The dread he inspires comes in part from both his own hugeness and that of the axe he carries, but even more so from the strangeness of his adoxic nature—from that about him that remains unknown. The violently arbitrary beheading game he proposes, after all, would ordinarily seem straightforwardly safe—an exchange of mortal blows with one from Arthur's court striking first—but the unknowableness of the Green Knight, it seems, causes Arthur's knights to suspect things might not be so simple. Like the test presented to Osbert Fitz Hugh in Gervase of Tilbury's account, the Green Knight's challenge is one that must be undertaken simply because it there for the taking, though it is only after the Green Knight's survival of his decapitation that Gawain realizes the true extent of its dangerousness.

Indeed, the decapitation itself is a horrifying scene, both eerily uncanny and grotesquely bloody at the same time—a scene that manifests, disturbingly, that sort of terror that breaks down the distinction between the living and the dead.⁶² It is, after all, intended to scare Guinevere to death, with “gopnyng of þat ilke gomen þat gostlych speked / Wyth his hede in his honde bfore þe hyȝe table” (2461–62). Holding its head in hand, the Green Knight's “vgly bodi þat bledde” (441)—now more like an animated corpse than a living body—explains that Gawain is to find him in a year's time to receive his return blow, a condition through which Gawain, by previously accepting the challenge, finds himself caught in the Green Knight's supernatural sovereign sphere. The arbitrary game of this adoxic knight, therefore, becomes a quest, but unlike most quests in romance, it is not for something desirable, which is worth questing toward, but rather for something deadly—for the bloody Green Knight standing before the court, head in hand, in all his strange and grotesque hideousness. Gawain, in other

words, has been banned, produced as a life with an arbitrarily fixed terminus, a life that, within this scheme, no longer counts. Bound by his *trouthe*, which effectively binds him to the apparent non-law of the Green Knight, Gawain thus becomes a “limit figure of life,” whose death would be neither sacrifice nor murder, but only the fulfillment of the random game initiated by the adoxic intruder.

Gawain’s quest, the consequence of the condition of the Green Knight’s ban, is one that leads him through the wilderness alone and in the cold, facing wild beasts and wild men, but more significantly, it is also an inner test of courage, of Gawain’s willingness to pursue that which should end his life. He has, on this adventure, much to fear, and his taking of the (supposedly) magical green girdle from Bertilak’s wife illustrates just how seriously he is afraid of what lies ahead. Indeed, the beheading game’s final act is, in many ways, the ultimate test of knightly courage, where Gawain must face what should surely be certain death simply for the sake of completing the arbitrary challenge set before him. The Green Knight, therefore, emerges in the course of Gawain’s trials an event, and like many adoxic figures in romance, his challenge is a test *sans* sense, pure trial for its own sake—a challenge only a supernatural (or quasi-supernatural) agent would initiate.

Dangerous Games

In the end, of course, the Green Knight proves to be less deadly than he initially appeared, and he is pleased with how Gawain undertook his trials (2334–5). But Gawain is less praising of himself. He blushes red for shame when the Green Knight explains that he “lakked a lyttel” and was found wanting in “lewté” (2366) for his taking of the girdle—an offense Gawain attributes to his lack of courage:

cowardyse me ta³t

To acorde me wyth couetyse, my kynde to forsake,

pat is larges and lewté pat longe³ to kny³te³. (2379–81)

It is, as Gawain says, unknighly (“my kynde to forsake”) to act cowardly, but perhaps more significantly, it is even more so to behave covetously and lack loyalty. In this case, though, the two are intertwined, and it is in this final scene with the Green Knight that Gawain learns that the testing of his

courage, while significant in its own right, was, above all, a means of testing other inner knightly virtues, his honor, loyalty, and integrity—his *trouthe*.

It is in this context that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* can be read as a romance in which the poet interrogates the moral character of Arthurian chivalry, and for this reason, I would argue, his choice of the Green Knight, of an adoxic testing agent, proves to be a uniquely effective narrative device. As with other such fairies in romance (and similar adoxic beings), the Green Knight has that particular ability to see into Gawain's inner self and, with that power, a corresponding supernatural ability to test those inner virtues. In order to challenge Gawain's *trouthe*, therefore, Bertilak instigates (independent of Morgan le Fay's intentions) the exchange of winnings game. Like the beheading game, it is an arbitrary test, a game that promises no ostensible reward, regardless of the outcome, for either Gawain or the Green Knight. Coupled with this arbitrariness, too, is the Green Knight's veiling of his true intentions, a feature that makes the test all the more challenging for Gawain, as not only does he not understand the full ramifications of his actions in playing the game, but he does not even realize his *trouthe* is being tested at all. This, though, is necessary for the test to work. It takes no special virtue to do the right thing when one knows someone else is watching, and if Gawain had understood the interrelationship between the Green Knight's two games before the end of the final beheading scene, the exchange of winnings game would not have been much of a test at all.

It is also the case, moreover, that not only does the beheading game rely upon the exchange of winnings game, but the exchange of winnings game also necessitates the beheading game. It has always been the case that a person's true character is best revealed in moments of crisis, or, rather, that it takes a crisis to have what is really inside show itself outwardly. For this reason Gawain is able to fend off the sexual temptation, but on the final day of testing it is Gawain's particular crisis, his realization of the dangers affected by his capture in the Green Knight's sovereign ban, which brings about his act of "cowardyse." The weakness of the flesh, for Gawain, is not the desire for his host's wife, nor for the girdle itself, but only for the preservation of his life at the expense of his *trouthe*. In the end the Green Knight, for precisely this reason, is forgiving of the offense ("Bot for æ lufed your lyf; þe lasse I yow blame," 2368), but Gawain is not so willing to

forget his unknighly act. He wears the green girdle back to Camelot and presents it to the court as a symbol of his “surfet” (2433), illustrating, in the end, not only Gawain’s awareness of what sort of tests he really undertook, but also just how difficult those tests really were. The knights of Arthur’s court, however, do not share Gawain’s knowledge or understand his experiences, and they take the green girdle as a symbol of the brotherhood of the round table. The girdle, therefore, becomes normalized within the human world of the text, separated from its original adoxic associations to become an orthodox sign of the “renoun” (2519) of Arthur’s court. But Gawain cannot share in such a normalization, in the courtly licensing of his “token of vntrawpe” (2509). He has, it seems, been marked by his encounter with the adoxic, and there is a sense in which, in the end, he cannot be fully reintegrated into the “broperhede” of his own court.⁶³

Much like the testing of Gawain’s inner virtues, Amadas is confronted with a similar challenge, a similar moment of crisis, and it is an episode intended to test not only his courage, but his *trouthe* as well. When the supernatural knight confronts Amadas in the graveyard he claims to be the man Ydoine truly loves, producing Ydoine’s ring, which Amadas had previously given her, as proof. At first Amadas blames Ydoine for her deceit and betrayal of their love, but then, upon looking on her grave, he realizes it would be wrong to condemn his beloved when she could not defend herself. He then vows to defend her honor with the tip of his sword. The bitter battle ensues—in which the mysterious knight pauses twice to allow Amadas to renounce Ydoine’s love—but when Amadas finally deals the finishing blow, the mysterious knight yields to Amadas, praising not only his martial prowess but also his other inner knightly virtues: his loyalty, honor, and courtesy. He then explains that Ydoine is not dead, and that she did not really give him her ring. Instead, she is merely enchanted by a magic ring he exchanged with the ring Amadas had given her, and that she will awake, in full health, when it is removed. He then congratulates Amadas on passing his test, and leaves the graveyard as suddenly as he arrived.

It is an episode, like the final beheading scene in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, that concludes leaving more questions than answers. But it is precisely this inextricability, this lack of any logical motivation behind the apparent non-law of the supernatural knight, that makes the test all the more difficult for Amadas, and like the games initiated by the Green Knight, the

testing of Amadas's *trouthe* works in conjunction with the testing of his courage. In the end the mysterious knight explains that it is not in his nature to kill Amadas, that his test was more moral than physical, but throughout the confrontation neither Amadas nor the reader has any way of predicting this to be the case. Like the Green Knight, this Otherworldly knight's masking of his true intentions is necessary for the test to work, for if Amadas had known beforehand that his devotion to Ydoine could possibly bring her back from the grave, the physical battle would have tested only that—merely his strength of arms, not the inner virtues of his heart. As it stands, though, Amadas is none the wiser, and he must take on this adoxic knight without any hope of a favorable end. But it is through this steadfast commitment to his beloved during the physical battle, and through the according display of his “vassalage,” “hardement,” and “corage,” that his “loiauté” (6358) emerges. And it is only through this demonstration of his loyalty, his *trouthe*, that he wins the knowledge to restore Ydoine to life.

This Otherworldly concern for *trouthe*, exhibited both by this supernatural knight and the Green Knight, comes with the expectation that in the end, despite the dangerousness of their arbitrary and seemingly menacing behavior, they too will uphold a certain code of ethics, a certain *trouthe* of their own. The Green Knight, after all, only gives Gawain a slight nick on his neck, though according to the rules of the beheading game, as articulated and understood within the world of the text, he could have done far worse. And the knight in *Amadas et Ydoine* similarly relents to Amadas and tells him the truth of Ydoine's enchantment after he feels Amadas had sufficiently passed his test, though there is no apparent intra-diegetic reason for why he should. The adoxic nature of these supernatural knights, therefore, is not ultimately manifest in any departure from an understanding of an orthodox ethical makeup of the Christian and chivalric universe, but rather it is manifest in the arbitrariness of their seemingly *unethical* behavior that paradoxically works to reinforce such an orthodox understanding. This upholding of this sort of ethical orthodoxy, however, is not uncommon among fairies and similar adoxic figures in romance. At the end of *Sir Orfeo* the Fairy King shows himself to be particularly concerned with Heurodis's well-being, despite his earlier abduction and enslavement of her in his terrifying liminal space. When he promises Orfeo one request as a reward for excellent harping, he is troubled by the thought of giving Heurodis up to a man whose body, now “lene, rowe & blac” (459), has

become ragged through its ten years of wandering in the wilderness: “A loplich þing it were, forþi, / To sen hir in þi compayni” (461–62). In the end, though, he keeps his word, his *trouthe*. Orfeo reminds him that it would be a “fouler þing” (464) to hear a lie (“lesing”) from the mouth of a king, and when the Fairy King agrees (“seþþen it is so,” 469), he returns Heurodis, attesting to a sort of orthodox ethical code that seems to exist as much in the supernatural alternative world as in the human world of the text.⁶⁴

This sort of ethics, moreover, seems to hold true in Otherworld accounts beyond romance as well. In the story of Richard of Sunderland, for example, after Richard refused to drink from the green drinking horn, the green-clad figures who originally abducted him eventually return him to the same place from which he had been taken, suggesting that his passing of this drinking test, similar to Thomas’s passing of the fruit-eating test in *Thomas of Erceldoune*, was the reason these green-clad figures released Richard from the bonds of their supernatural sovereign sphere, though there is no logical reason, or diegetic expectation, for why they should do so. A similar act of Otherworldly ethics occurs in Walsingham’s account of the little red man. The incident of interest occurs when the young girl who finds the youth maddened in the wilderness brings him to the shrine of St. John of Beverley to be healed. But when it seems the boy is to be restored by St. John of Beverley, the saint’s power is only implicit in the healing—it is the beautiful lady (who previously had him tortured) who returns to restore his brain (and his sanity). And furthermore, at the end of the account, after the youth has grown to become a priest, the little red man who had led him to the lady to be tortured appears to him again during the elevation of the Host, saying:

Sit amodo tibi custos, quem tu tenes in manibus; novit nempe ipse te quam ego melius custodire.

[From now on let him be your keeper, whom you hold in your hands; he knows, without doubt, how to protect you better than I have.]⁶⁵

Here there is a sense in which all such supernatural beings must submit to the ultimate power of God, where even ones as malevolent as the little red man and beautiful lady must uphold certain codes of conduct. Indeed, as the end of this episode suggests, the account takes on a certain hagiographical air, but, as in the miracle of Richard of Sunderland, it is one where

traditional motifs are confused, where the roles typically assigned to such orthodox figures as demons and saints are substituted by the ambiguous supernatural. In this sense, though, it is the opposite of the Richard of Sunderland account. Richard's is a miracle story that comes close to transforming into a tale of the purely marvelous, whereas this account is a story of wonder that comes close to becoming an account of a miracle. Indeed, the account's resistance to becoming a more traditionally orthodox miracle story seems almost as odd as the actions of the adoxic beings who keep such a development at bay. But though these figures confuse the good/evil dichotomy of traditional Augustinian theology such miracle stories necessitate, they still work, in the end, to reaffirm the ultimate power of Christ.⁶⁶

Thus, like the Green Knight, the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo*, and the supernatural knight in *Amadas et Ydoine*, the beautiful lady in this account is the solution as well as the problem—she is the adoxic agent of violence, of conflict, but she is also the supernatural force that ultimately reinforces an orthodox conception of the Christian universe, and that, correspondingly, brings about the story's favorable resolution. In these romances and Otherworld accounts, therefore, there emerges what we might call a sort of *adoxic mercy*, where the supernatural figures eventually release their captives from the sovereign ban, from the structures of their arbitrary non-law, and effectively restore them from their prior reduction to bare life. In all cases such mercy is, intra-diegetically, as arbitrary as the initial violence itself, but in both romance and in the Otherworld accounts, it is a narratological necessity. In the Otherworld accounts (and in this respect *Thomas of Erceldoune* perhaps belongs more with this group than with romance), it is a logical inevitability that the human figures are eventually released from the supernatural sphere, for it is only in returning to the human world that the accounts can be recorded at all. Such logic is not a requisite of romance, but there is nevertheless a generic expectation that the human world, or the humans of that world, will be restored to some sort of orthodox equilibrium, and that that restoration will culminate in the text's happy conclusion in accordance with such an orthodoxy. Indeed, from a phenomenological perspective, it is precisely this condition that makes adoxic figures ideal testing agents in romance, for not only do they neatly provide both the instigation and eventual resolution of the narrative's central crisis (the potentiality of the sovereign decision realized as both

oppressive and merciful), but their seeming arbitrariness, inherent within their adoxic nature, creates the extra-diegetic suspense, both as to what potentially random shape that crisis will take, and as to how, or when, it will ultimately be resolved.⁶⁷

This sort of adoxic mercy, moreover, can be used in romance not only to bring about a happy ending and reinforce an orthodox understanding of the Christian universe, but also to provide instruction in chivalric behavior. Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale" does exactly that. The tale's adventure begins with a test, but it is a challenge set not by a supernatural opponent, but by the ladies of Arthur's court. A knight, convicted of rape, must discover in a year's time "What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren" (3.905). It is a fittingly difficult test, and the knight quickly realizes just how impossible his charge really is. He has, in effect, been brought into the sovereign sphere of the Arthurian court, banished to a life constituting and eventually depending on the fulfillment of a condition he cannot possibly meet. Indeed, he collects a number of answers, no two alike, and after the year passes he sets off for Arthur's court without a suitable response. While riding home, however, he crosses the "forest syde," where:

he saugh upon a daunce go
Of ladyes foure and twenty, and yet mo;
Toward the whiche daunce he drow ful yerne,
In hope that som wysdom sholde he lerne.
But certeinly, er he cam fully there,
Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where.
No creature saugh he that bar lyf,
Save on the grene he saugh sittynge a wyf—
A fouler wight ther may no man devyse. (3.991–9)

This foul "wyf" offers the knight the right answer provided he agrees to fulfill a single request. That is, she proposes an effective release from the ban of the Arthurian court, and therefore from certain death, in exchange for being held under her own sovereign decision. That this agreement leads to another form of banishment, to the seemingly arbitrary decision of marriage to a mysterious and hideous old woman, shifts the narrative focus from the knight's condition of his initial ban to his new relation with this apparently adoxic figure. Indeed, the old hag is never said to be a fairy, but

neither is she, it seems, human. The tale is set when all the land is “fulfild of fayerye” (3.859), and where

The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede. (3.860–1)

The woman the knight meets and the dancing elf-queen may very well be one and the same (as the similarities seem to imply), but even if she is not, she is at least fully supernatural, as unlike the women in the other Loathly Lady analogues, her power to turn beautiful comes from within herself.⁶⁸ And it is this supernatural ability, this adoxic power, that facilitates the knight’s second test. On the night of the arranged wedding the knight is given a long speech (nearly 100 lines) on that sort of “gentillesse” that comes from God—on *trouthe*—and at the end given a choice whether to have his bride beautiful and unfaithful or ugly and loyal.⁶⁹ The knight, having learned his lesson, then decides to put himself into the “wise governance” (3.1231) of his wife, at which point he is given the best of the two options: both beauty and fidelity.

Like most Chaucerian romances, the Wife’s tale is by no means typical of the texts discussed in this chapter, but though the entire romance does not contain a single battle or challenge between knights, it is nevertheless concerned with testing its chief protagonist. Indeed, though this final test is in no way concerned with knightly prowess, or even knightly courage, it is aligned with the tests Orfeo, Gawain, and Amadas undertake in that it is intended to challenge those inner virtues. Like many of the Otherworldly figures already discussed, this fairy woman has that ability to see into the knight’s inner self, and with it, she betrays a corresponding concern for those inner values. As with the Otherworldly mistress in *Thomas of Erceldoune*, she can change between extreme beauty and extreme hideousness, but unlike Thomas’s fairy mistress, her changing form carries with it explicit moral implications; it is an outward transformation that serves to reinforce her Christian and chivalric instruction, and, in the end, echo the inner transformation brought about within the knight. Consequently, though she may not be as dreadful or as menacing as the other supernatural figures previously mentioned, her adoxic powers and associations allow her to test beyond the normal, and like all Otherworldly testing agents, she therefore operates within the romance as a means of

developing knightly ideals, of bringing out in her chosen knight those inner qualities essential to what it means to embody the “floure of Chyvalrye.”

This chapter has investigated these supernatural figures who, like the mysterious woman in the Wife’s tale, function as the challenge against which knightly values are tested and defined. In drawing on Agamben’s recent theorizations of sovereign power, it has focused particularly on the adoxic nature of these figures and the worlds they occupy, showing, through this process, a consistent authorial strategy relying on the intradiegetic arbitrariness of such figures. Such a characteristic not only enables a certain continuity in representations of fairy tests across romance, but it also, at the same time, insists on the persistent singularity of these testing figures in each textual appearance. A reading of these adoxic figures as producing and occupying “states of exception,” therefore, provides a way in to thinking about the unique dangers, and corresponding challenges, that fairies and the ambiguous supernatural can present in the text-worlds of their romances, and also, how these romances can flip these dangerous circumstances into favorable endings that, in many cases, ultimately work to reinforce an orthodox understanding of the Christian and chivalric universe. Indeed, this is precisely what happens in Chaucer’s Arthurian romance. As a mysterious old hag, the Otherworldly woman is a figure who can test the Christian and chivalric values of her chosen knight beyond ordinary human agency, and, as the beautiful woman she becomes, she is also a fairy mistress who can reward the demonstration of such virtues beyond normal human means. That is, once her test is complete and the knight has sufficiently demonstrated his *trouthe*, she has the ability to act beyond the limits of the normal world to bring about the tale’s happy ending—to fulfill the knight’s desires beyond any conceivable expectation. And it is to these possibilities of desire, love, and reward—of Otherworldly fulfillment—that the next chapter turns.

CHAPTER 4

FAIRY MISTRESSES: GIFTS AND TABOOS

*An elf-queene wol I love, ywis,
For in this world no womman is
Worthy to be my make . . .*

—Geoffrey Chaucer, “*Sir Thopas*” (7.790–92)

While the dangerous fairies of romance may, through a form of adoxic mercy, reward the knights they test for their courage and *trouthe*, it is the fairy mistresses in romance who are most widely known for using their supernatural powers to fulfill the desires of their chosen knights. The fairy woman of the “Wife of Bath’s Tale” straddles both roles: when the knight successfully passes her test on “gentillesse” she uses her shape-shifting abilities to release him from the ban of marriage to an old hag (that is, from being both *out-lawed* and held *within the law* by her sovereign exception), but it is precisely this release that works to provide the kind of erotic fulfillment, typical of fairy mistresses, that would be impossible in the ordinary human world. In another romance in the *Canterbury* collection, the Chaucer-narrator’s own “Sir Thopas,” Chaucer relies heavily on this generically assumed correlation between fairy mistresses and erotic wish-fulfillment. Near the beginning of the tale the eponymous hero dreams of a fairy mistress and, as this quotation indicates, sets himself on a quest to find an “elf-queene” who can fulfill his amorous wishes. His proclamation that no ordinary human woman is worthy of his affections, and that only a fairy is good enough to be his “lemman” (7.788), suggests just how well-known fairy mistresses were for their ability to fulfill romantic desires—a generic convention that proved remarkably persistent in romance, from the Breton *lais* of the twelfth century through to Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and beyond.¹ But a fairy mistress’s wish-fulfilling abilities are rarely just erotic, and the favors of their love are often accompanied by supernatural gifts that aid their chosen knights in social, economic, and political terms: gifts of

unlimited wealth, supernatural healing, magical objects, protective aid, even prophecy—gifts that help knights rise in their chivalric and feudal worlds.

Despite these seemingly idealistic roles, however, fairy mistresses are rarely unproblematic figures in romance. Indeed, in many cases their dangerousness approximates that of the adoxic testing figures considered in the previous chapter, but what distinguishes fairy mistresses from these ostensibly challenging fairies is that while the latter may transform their dangerous tests into favorable ends, the former may, in a sense, do just the opposite. That is, while they may initially appear to be ostensibly wish-fulfilling, the gifts of fairy mistresses may change into offerings that come to look as though they are not really gifts at all, into offerings that appear to be more like curses than rewards. Indeed, since such fairy gifts are rarely ever ordinary gifts, since they nearly always hold the possibility of taking away as much, or more, than they give, it may be useful to think of them as *dangerous gifts*—as supernatural favors that can be distinguished from ordinary human gifts in that they contain within them an inherent volatility connected with their potential to be both hazardous and rewarding.

Such volatility is often linked to a certain proximity to demonic temptresses or evil enchantresses in the imaginative networks in which these romances participated, and this chapter will first be concerned with the erotic lure of fairy mistresses in romance, and with the corresponding extra- and intra-diegetic anxieties generated through such an association with these purely malevolent figures. The rewards of a fairy mistress, however, are dangerous even when such demonic associations are not an issue, or when they are dispelled early, within a romance's internal folklore, and this dangerousness is nearly always related to the connection between gifts and taboos, as fairy mistresses rarely give the former without imposing the latter. Work on both gifts and taboos has remained largely the preserve of cultural and historical anthropologists, and it will be useful to consider the directions both concepts have been taken in these fields.² Also, theories of gifts and gift-exchange systems have enjoyed something of a successful integration into literary studies, and in recent years there has been some work done on their role in medieval romance. Taboos, on the other hand, have not received such cross-disciplinary interest, and they still remain under-discussed and under-theorized not only by medievalists but by literary critics at large.³ A study of fairy mistresses, however, provides a unique opportunity for thinking about both the nature of taboos and their

particular function in literary texts, and, at the same time, about their intricate association with gifts. This chapter, therefore, in drawing on anthropological approaches to both phenomena, develops a new reading in which this interplay in romance between fairy gifts and fairy taboos leads to the development of complex relationships in which knights become “sacred,” or “taboo,” through their association with these fairies and the dangerous gifts they offer.

The word “taboo” (or *tabu*, *tapu*) was first used in English by Captain James Cook, who adopted the Tongan term (*tabu*) from the Pacific islanders he encountered during his third and final voyage in the late 1770s.⁴ As Cook understood it, and as it is still understood in English today, the word denotes something that is prohibited, something that is set apart or consecrated (*OED*, taboo, adj. 1). In Polynesian and Maori the form *tapu* is a compound derived from *ta*, to mark, and *pu*, an adverb of intensity, and therefore means something like “marked thoroughly,” used to signify a person or object that has become sacred.⁵ Indeed, the Latin *sacer* is a close equivalent, a word that was borrowed into Middle English to denote someone or something that has been consecrated or set apart by God, like a bishop or king, or the sacraments (*MED*, sacre, n. 2; sacren, v. 3; sacrament, n. 1 and 2).⁶ In Irish the close equivalent of *tabu* and *sacer* is *geis* (pl. *geasa*), which Reinhard defines as “a prohibition or injunction forbidding a person to do, or enjoining him to do, certain things.” In medieval romance, however, such injunctions are always negative, that is, they are always forbidding, never enjoining.⁷ “Taboo,” therefore, in ways more specific than *geis*, has a sense about it of something unapproachable or forbidden, most often expressed, as Freud recognized, in prohibitions or restrictions, and it is precisely injunctions of this sort (those concerned with that which is sacred) that are characteristic of fairy mistress taboos in romance.⁸ Thus, in this context, Agamben’s concept of *homo sacer* takes on new significance, for as Freud also recognized, it is a particular condition of the taboo that its violation makes the offender himself taboo—“as if the whole of the dangerous charge had been transferred over to him.”⁹ Considering this characteristic of transference, this chapter will investigate the dangerous potentiality of fairy mistress taboos. By focusing on the elaborate ways in which these fairies complicate the text-worlds of their romances, both through their proximity to the demonic and through their association

with gifts and taboos, it will assess the complex strategies through which authors use fairy mistresses as embodied events, not only to provide erotic fulfillment and socioeconomic aid, but also, simultaneously, to provide unique forms of narrative tension and conflict.

Figures of Desire

Sir Thopas's quest for an elf queen is a pursuit for that which is unavailable in the human world. His claim that only an elf-queen is good enough to be his mistress relies upon an understanding that, as far as erotic wish-fulfillment goes, fairy mistresses can provide the highest form of gratification. They are, indeed, more beautiful than the most beautiful of human women, and since it is nearly always the case that desire begins with visual contact, they immediately inspire love.¹⁰ Desire in romance, as James Schultz has recently observed, does not well up within the lover and inspire him to seek an object, but rather the other way around; the cause of love is always external, and nearly always enacted through sight.¹¹ This interplay between sight, beauty, and desire is exhibited in nearly all meetings between humans and fairy mistresses, both within and beyond romance. Such a meeting occurs in Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia*, in which he records one of the earliest accounts of the Melusine legend. Gervase describes how Raymond, riding alone through the forest on horseback, is suddenly confronted by an extraordinary lady. She is second to none in beauty (*nulli decore secunda*), and the sight of her, mounted on a richly caparisoned palfrey and adorned in splendid clothing and ornaments, immediately rouses Raymond's lustful (*lascivus*) desires.¹²

Walter Map, writing just a few years before Gervase, describes a similar meeting with a fairy mistress. He tells of Eadric Wild, a knight who, as mentioned in [chapter 1](#), encounters a group of dancing ladies while riding alone at night. He finds the ladies to be of the utmost beauty, and one, especially, he considers more desirable than the others—more desirable, in fact, than any favorite of a king (*super omnes regum delicias desiderabilem*). At the sight of this lady Eadric receives a wound to his heart (*Hac uisa, miles accipit uulnus in cor*), and eventually, as Raymond does with Melusine, he takes her as his bride.¹³ A similar Otherworldly meeting occurs in perhaps the earliest extant fairy mistress story, Marie de France's *Lanval* (c.1184). Marie describes how Lanval is brought to an

elegant and richly adorned tent, in which he finds a young woman lying on her bed. She is of astonishing beauty, well-shaped and radiantly white, and although she has draped herself in a cloak of ermine, her whole side is uncovered, exposing her face, neck, and breasts. The sight of her immediately inspires love:

Il l'esgarda, si la vit bele;
Amurs le puint de l'estencele,
Que sun quor alume e esprent. (117–19)

[He looked at her and saw that she was beautiful. Love's spark pricked him so that his heart was set alight.]

It is, conventionally, love at first sight, but at the same time the episode is unusual in romance in making the instigation of that love eroticized through partial nudity—a state, as Amanda Hopkins observes, that can often be more erotic than total nakedness.¹⁴ Indeed, it is perhaps one of the most sexually charged scenes in all of romance, and the English versions revel in its visually erotic elements. In both the early-fourteenth-century *Sir Landevale* and in Thomas Chestre's later *Sir Launfal* the fairy mistress is entirely naked from the waist up, and the image of her bare body inspires further elaboration. As the author of *Landevale* describes:

Thereon lay that maydyn bright,
Almost nakyd, and vpright.
Al her clothes byside her lay:
Syngly was she wrappyd, parfay,
With a mauntell of hermyn,
Coverid was with alexanderyn.
The mantell for hete down she dede
Right to hir gyrdillstede.
She was white as lely in May,
Or snowe þat fallith yn wynterday;
Blossom on brere, ne no floure,
Was not like to her coloure;
The rede rose whan it is newe
To her rud is not of hewe. (97–110)

The scene is itself a form of wish-fulfillment, in which the fairy mistress is stylized in such a way as to entice the gazing male to project his fantasies onto her “Almost nakyd” body.¹⁵ She becomes, in Freudian terms, a

scopophilic object—an object of sexual stimulation activated through sight—and her erotic force is further enhanced (and prolonged) through description and rhetorical elaboration.¹⁶ This is not to say that the cultural meanings of nakedness are ahistorical, nor that nakedness (in any period or cultural context) need always be associated with sexual passion, but rather that it would be difficult to fail to register the erotic connotations of the fairy mistress's partial nakedness in this scene, especially since it leads not only to love, but also to sex.¹⁷

Indeed, the English versions, following a rather veiled allusion in *Lanval* (153–54), depict more explicitly the immediate fulfillment of the fairy mistress's offer of her sexual favors. As Chestre describes:

þe wente to bedde, & þat anoon,
Launfal and sche yn fere.
For play lytyll þey sclepte þat nyȝt,
Tyll on morn hyt was daylyȝt. (347–50)

Tryamour, therefore, not only inspires love through her superlative beauty and near-naked appearance—through her orchestration of a scopophilic moment—but she also facilitates the immediate erotic gratification of that love. Her body, consequently, may be understood as a gift bestowed on Launfal in a system of “total prestations,” in which “person-gifts” become indistinguishable from “thing-gifts,” in this case a bottomless purse and supernatural chivalric accoutrements (a steed, a knave, and armor that always protects, 318–33).¹⁸ Characteristic of a gift-exchange system is the inalienable nature of both the objects transacted and the subjects involved in the transaction; unlike commodity exchange, which creates relationships solely between *things*, in gift exchange the relationship created is between *people*.¹⁹ It is for this reason that Lewis Hyde speaks of gift exchange as an “erotic” commerce, in which he opposes the *eros* of the gift (the principle of attraction, union, and involvement that binds together) to the *logos* of the commodity (reason and logic in general, the principle of differentiation in particular). In such a system of exchange gifts become “incorporative” objects—that is, objects that unite transactors beyond the moment of exchange—and it is precisely the “erotic” nature of the gift that generates the creation of this intimate bond between the receiver and the giver.²⁰ Typically, though, women-as-gifts are embedded in a system of exchange

enacted solely between men, where the indistinguishability between *res* and *personae* applies only to the women-objects who can be transacted in this system.²¹ But fairy mistresses both construct and constitute total gift systems that operate independently from any exchange structures existing within the human worlds of their texts. They create unique systems where the subject and the object of the gift transaction are one and the same, and therefore where the bond created through such a transaction in effect ties the receiver simultaneously to both the giver and to the gift itself. In such an “erotic” system containing an eroticized giver/gift, therefore, the sexual gratification given by the fairy mistress creates a unique bond between giver and receiver that leads to a certain *bondage to the gift*, a bondage that reveals not only the indebtedness of the receiver, but also the *interestedness* of the gift itself.

In anthropological contexts the interestedness of the gift is always figurative, as it relates to the machinations of reciprocity (inherent in any gift-exchange system) that becomes abstractly focused in the gift-object.²² But in *Launfal*, as in many other fairy mistress romances, the interestedness of the gift—its binding demand for reciprocity—becomes literally expressed through the amalgamation of the giver/gift, making the continued valence of the gift itself—not the gift system—contingent on the appropriate counter-behavior of the recipient. However, it is precisely this interestedness of the gift and the reciprocity structured within the gift-exchange system that leads Derrida to argue for the impossibility of any *real* gift. As he says in *Given Time*: “in the economic odyssey of the circle as soon as [a gift] appears *as* gift or as soon as it signifies *itself as* gift, there is no longer any ‘logic of the gift,’ and one may safely say that a consistent discourse on the gift becomes impossible.” In other words, as Derrida continues, it is this logic of gift and counter-gift that “impels the gift *and* the annulment of the gift.”²³ With fairy mistress gifts, however, it is the impossibility of any equivalent reciprocity—that reciprocity being the very fact of appropriate exchange that leads Derrida to argue for the impossibility of the gift—that makes a *real* gift, in this sense, possible.

Since supernatural gifts can never be adequately reciprocated by someone from the human world, therefore, it appears that there is an imbalance in the exchange system. This, indeed, seems to be the case, and in anthropological contexts such a situation would normally lead to the

termination of the relationship (hence Derrida's understanding of the gift-circle's double-bind, in which gifts are annulled as gifts precisely through the *necessity* of their reciprocation). But what takes the place of the counter-gift in these romances is the taboo, or rather the appropriate fulfillment of the conditions of the taboo. Indeed, there is a sense in which this giver/gift relation and its resultant binding of the receiver is not a purely supernatural phenomenon in romance, as it is often the case that human heroines not only embody the gifts that their suitors desire, but also hold the power to give or deny those gifts at will. What makes fairy mistresses unique in this context, however, is both the impossibility of a supernatural counter-gift and the nature of the conditional taboo that otherwise complicates a straightforward reciprocating gift-giving structure. In a system combining gifts and taboos, therefore, the supernatural gifts of the fairy mistress maintain their status as *real* gifts, in that they cannot be reciprocated, but at the same time they also allow for the continuance of such a one-sided gift-exchange relationship (that is, they still maintain their status as interested gifts) in that the continuation of their favors becomes contingent on the binding conditions of the taboo that takes the place of gift-giving reciprocity. These taboos take a variety of forms—Tryamour's being that Launfal should "make no bost of me" (362)—and while in the working-out of the plot it emerges that this taboo proves to be particularly dangerous for Launfal (such interestedness in effect making the giver/gift herself *dangerous*, on which more later), there is nevertheless a sense that, at the moment of the imposition of the taboo, there is a certain disjunction between the supernatural gifts and their binding condition. Indeed, it seems the value of Tryamour's favors far exceeds the seemingly straightforward and undemanding taboo.²⁴

There is, within this initial relation of gift and taboo, something of an appeal to fantasy, to what Helen Cooper describes as the "human desire to have something for nothing," or next to nothing, as the case may be.²⁵ But "something for nothing," or something close to it, is generally too good to be true (in life as in romance), and there often emerges in the giving of *real* gifts a sneaking suspicion that things might not be as they seem.²⁶ This is especially true in romance when those gifts are sexual favors from mysterious beautiful women, for while Tryamour proves to be ultimately benign, and while Launfal never suspects otherwise, it is more often the case that, if a supernatural woman is not actually demonic or associated

with evil within a romance's internal folklore, she is at least suspected of it. This is precisely what happens in the late-twelfth-century *Desiré*, in which the eponymous hero initially suspects his supernatural mistress had bewitched him, but she eventually assures him that she is not “de male part”—a declaration proven explicitly as fictional fact by her attending mass and partaking of the sacraments (429–36).²⁷ Similar assurances, as mentioned in [chapter 1](#), are made in *Melusine* (31) and *Huon of Burdeux* (69), and in *Partonope of Blois* the hero initially fears Melior may be a “deuelle” or a “ffynde” until he hears her mention the name of “Crystes moder” (1344–47). In Marie de France's *Yonec*, too, the woman locked away by her jealous husband is initially suspicious of her supernatural lover, but he reassures her that he believes in God (149), and to put to rest any doubts as to his nondemonic nature, he eventually receives the “Corpus domini” (186).²⁸

As *Huon of Burdeux* illustrates, gift-giving fairies can occasionally be male, and as *Yonec* shows, along with the early-thirteenth-century *Tydorel*, such male fairies can provide erotic gifts as well. There are, however, strong intra-generic and intertextual reasons for why the woman in *Yonec* should be apprehensive, for male fairy lovers also hold particular generic associations with the demonic. They do so not because they share characteristics with demonic temptresses, as fairy mistresses do, but because they can often share certain qualities with the more common supernatural male lover in romance: the incubus demon (as appears in *Sir Gowther*, *Robert le Diable* and its English translations, and all accounts in romance of Merlin's father).²⁹ The supernatural status of the Otherworldly lover in *Tydorel*, somewhat unusually, is never made explicit. Initially he appears to function much like an incubus, emerging only to impregnate the heroine. But neither he nor his offspring betray any malevolent characteristics, and his first appearance riding a white horse (83) seems to serve as a marker of his noninfernal Otherworldly origins (as does the fact that in the end, his son, on learning the truth of his supernatural father, plunges into the same lake in which his father had previously disappeared in order to find him).³⁰

The only other supernatural male lover in romance is the “fairi knyȝte” in *Sir Degarré*, though he too, in raping a princess and impregnating her with the hero, initially appears much like an incubus. He does, though, call her

his “lemman” (107) and claims “Ich have i-loved þe mani a 3er” (105), and the possibility of the family reunion that crowns the romance (facilitated by his gifts of magical gloves and a sword to serve as recognition tokens) seems to rewrite the rape as love—the kind of love that leads to a happy ending.³¹ The author of *Degarré*, therefore, like the author of *Tydorel*, creates an incoherent or incomplete internal folklore in the text-world of his romance in which there seems to be an intentional amalgamation of incubi and fairy motifs. Indeed, the seemingly contradictory fictional facts of the rapist/lover initially appear to make no sense at all, but in the end this sort of intra-world overdetermination proves to be an effective narrative strategy. In both *Degarré* and *Tydorel* the inciting incident (the conception of the hero and the immediate departure of the father that leads to the Fair Unknown plot) hinges on the initial incubus-like behavior of the supernatural figure. But while this is a necessity for the narrative’s structure, it is also necessary that the demonic associations are eventually lost in order to allow for the fulfillment of the Fair Unknown quest—the happy reunion of the hero with his supernatural father.

Indeed, while romance authors were typically very careful to distinguish their fairies from the strictly demonic, there are, in addition to the rather unusual cases of *Tydorel* and *Degarré*, other narrative advantages in intentionally maintaining a level of ambiguity in this regard, at least to a certain point in the narrative. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for instance, Gawain has reason to believe that the Green Knight may be the “fende” right up to his arrival at the Green Chapel (2185–94), and it is only after the final beheading-game scene that Gawain, with the audience, believes he can safely rule out any possibility of infernal origins. This sort of ambiguity holds true, in certain cases, for fairy mistresses as well. It is only at 1300 lines into *Partonope of Blois* that the hero is assured of Melior’s nondemonic nature, after he had worried profusely over being entrapped by the “deuelle” (746) during his adventures on the unmanned boat, enchanted by the “þe develles werke” (888) in the mysterious deserted city and tricked by an “Illusione / Off þe deuylle” (1284–85) in Melior’s bedchamber. And in *Desiré*, too, the narrative progresses for 430 lines, over half the romance, before the hero’s fears that he had been bewitched are finally put to rest. In these fairy mistress romances, as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, such intra-world suspension of the possibility of demonic activity seems to function as a means of building both extra- and intra-

diegetic suspense, as a way of maintaining tension—at least for a time—in a narrative that would conventionally be expected to end happily with a human or fairy lover. Indeed, while fairy mistresses may prove to be dangerous for the hero, they are at least never wholly evil, whereas demonic temptresses offer no possibility of eventual fulfillment.

Malory, following the Vulgate *Queste*, has two such temptresses in his “Tale of the Sankgreall.” The first, a “jantillwoman of grete beauté,” appears to Perceval on a ship covered in black silk. She is the “fayryst creature that ever he saw,” and like many fairy mistresses, she treats him to a sumptuous feast, during which he “dranke there the strengyst wyne that ever he dranke.” She then tempts him in an erotic game, in which “she refused hym in a maner whan he requyred her, for cause he sholde be the more ardente on hir,” and when he is “well enchaffed” they go to bed together, naked. But here, as Corinne Saunders points out, the lure of the erotic is potentially fatal, and when he crosses himself in bed the pavilion turns “up-so-downe,” and in a black cloud of smoke the woman disappears on the wind over the burning sea (2.915–20; XIV:8–10).³² Bors, too, is similarly tempted on his quest by the sexual advances of the “rychyst lady and the fayryste of the worlde.” But here as well, when he refuses to break his chastity, she disappears in “a grete noyse and a grete cry as all the fyndys of helle had bene aboute hym” (2.963–66; XVI:11–12).³³ The parallels between these temptresses and fairy mistresses are obvious (namely their superlative beauty, extreme wealth, erotic lure, and forthright sexual advances), and this proximity to the demonic, this potential actually to *be* temptresses capable of sending knights to eternal damnation, as Saunders says, illustrates precisely why (in an intra-generic context) fairy mistresses are so often treated with suspicion on first appearance within the internal folklores of their romances.³⁴ Adding to such suspicions, too, is the intertextual proximity of fairy mistresses to succubae and other demonic women in the legendaries and chronicles circulating in these imaginative networks (on which more later). And to intensify already existing doubts, evil enchantresses, such as Malory’s Morgan or Hallewes, or the Dame d’Amour of Chestre’s *Lybeaus Desconus*, are known for luring unsuspecting knights into their traps through their beauty and erotic advances. The gifts of these evil temptresses, therefore, may be considered *negative gifts*. That is, they are purely malevolent offerings that can be distinguished from dangerous gifts in that, despite their initial allure, they

contain within them no possibility of reward—they are intended solely to entrap, to lead knights astray, or to bring them to physical or spiritual ruin. They are, indeed, gifts that ultimately prove to be *false*.³⁵

It is in this context that the strange shape-shifting of the fairy mistress in *Thomas of Erceldoune* begins to make more sense. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the romance begins when Thomas, alone on Huntley Banks, is approached by a “lady gaye”—a woman whose full beauty, the narrator tells us, could never be described (37–40). At the sight of her, in a scopophilic reaction, he begs for her love—“pou gyffe me leue to lye the bye!” (100)—but to this she protests:

pou mane, þat ware folye,
I praye þe, Thomas, þou late me bee;
ffor j saye þe full sekirlye,
þat synne will for-doo all my beaute. (101–4)

That erotic gratification would be a “synne” is unusual in romances with supernatural women, unless of course the maintaining of one’s chastity is the point, as it is in romances with evil temptresses and enchantresses. One of the more severe of such examples is Lancelot’s encounter with the sorceress Hallewes in the *Morte Darthur*, for if he had given her only a single kiss, he would have died and she would have kept his body: “Than wolde I have bawmed hit and sered hit, and so to have kepte hit my lyve dayes; and dayly I sholde have clypped the and kyssed the, dispyte of quene Gwenyvere” (1.281; VI:15).³⁶ But in *Thomas of Erceldoune*, the troubling effects of such a sexual sin, at least initially, appear only to concern the woman herself, not Thomas. He therefore ignores the caution, insisting further until she eventually accedes to his advances (124). Thomas’s insistence on sex in this scene could be considered what Helen Cooper calls “sexual bullying,” since “it is scarcely a freely willed choice on her part,” and such bullying, indeed, works to suggest something of what Corinne Saunders calls “the eroticism of force,” in which resistance spurs the lover on, fueling his desire.³⁷ But immediately following the fulfillment of Thomas’s lustful wishes, the woman’s warning proves true, and her extreme beauty turns to extreme hideousness. It is at this point that she demands that he follow her out of “Medill-erthe,” and it is also at this point that Thomas believes her to be the “Dewyll” (144), a belief that leads him to repent of

his sin—"I trowe my dedis wyll wirke me care" (166)—as he prays for divine deliverance (161–68).

In this scene, therefore, and throughout the rest of the romance, the *Thomas*-Poet negotiates the conventions of both fairy mistresses and demonic temptresses in order to play with audience expectations. In maintaining, right up to the end of the romance, an indeterminacy between negative and dangerous gifts, the author creates an overdetermined text-world through which he is not only able to build tension and create suspense, but also, in the end, to allow for Thomas's recovery and explain his prophetic powers. Indeed, the sight of a beautiful lady, appearing like a fairy mistress on a dapple-grey horse with bells on the bridle at first inspires the hero's desires, but in initially resisting him, like the temptress in Malory's *Perceval* episode, she further fuels his lust by denying immediate gratification.³⁸ It is only after the "synne" of erotic fulfillment, however, that Thomas realizes he has been caught, banned by this mysterious woman, and his terrifying journey to her realm, a realm literally in close proximity to hell (as the devil himself comes to take a tithe every seven years), illustrates the dangerous potentiality of Thomas's engagement with this woman. In the end, however, the author plays with these conventions. The lady returns to her former beauty once they reach her realm, and though it is a realm in close proximity to hell, it is also a beautiful place full of "all manere of mynstralsye" (260). In the end, too, the supernatural woman proves to be ultimately benign, saving Thomas from the devil's levy by returning him safely home, and like all fairy mistresses, bestowing on him supernatural gifts—gifts of prophetic powers and a few prophecies of her own to boot—*real* gifts indeed.

Of all ambiguous supernatural women in romance, however, the one who most closely approximates the demonic is Cassodorien in *Richard Coer de Lion*. In many ways she first appears to be very much a fairy (57–101), or then simply human (104–84), but ultimately her inability to withstand the Elevation of the Host puts serious strain on any nondemonic interpretation. The problem with this, though, is that she betrays no further demonic qualities, and she is, after all, the mother of the hero—a "noble kynge and conqueroure" (250).³⁹ In the end, though, such equivocation, such lack of diegetic saturation within the romance's text-world, ultimately proves to be a rather clever narrative strategy. In this context it is worth noting that, from the late twelfth century, there existed a legend that the house of Plantagenet

sprung from demonic origins. Gerald of Wales records the legend in his *De Principis Instructione*, first penned while Henry II was on the throne, but surviving only in a single copy that was rewritten after the death of John, at a time when there was strong baronial support for placing Prince Louis of France, not Henry III, on the English throne.⁴⁰ Typical of this sort of account in the chronicles, the story goes that Henry II's father, Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, wedded a woman of remarkable beauty but of unknown origin (*formæ conspicuæ sed nationis ignotæ*). She attended church very rarely, and when she did she never stayed for the duration. But when Geoffrey picked up on this irregularity he had her detained for the presentation of the sacraments, at which point she put two of her four children under her arm and flew out through a lofty window of the church, never to be seen again.⁴¹

Following the profound failure of John's reign, and the prior disgrace of Henry after his murder of the "beatum martyrem Thomam," it is an account used to give an explanation for the perpetual debasement of the whole line (*perpetuam generis totius ignominiam*). Gerald, too, specifically links the account with Richard:

Istud autem rex Ricardus sæpe referre solebat, dicens non esse mirandum, si de genere tali et filii parentes et sese ad invicem fratres infestare non cessent; de diabolo namque eos omnes venisse et ad diabolum dicebat ituros esse.

[Moreover, king Richard was often accustomed to refer to this event; saying that it was no matter of wonder, if coming from such a race, sons should not cease to harass their parents, and brothers to quarrel amongst each other; for he knew that they all had come of the devil, and to the devil they would go.]⁴²

In making the demonic woman the mother of Henry II, therefore, Gerald can use the legend to account for the corruption of the whole of the Plantagenet house, and in putting in the mouth of Richard an acknowledgment of these demonic origins, he can create within his text the simulacrum of such an oral legend circulating within these courtly spheres.⁴³ In this light, therefore, it appears as though the author of *Richard* took an actual-world fact, or rather the fact of an actual-world folklore, and manipulated it to serve the needs of his romanticized narrative of Richard's life. Making the supernatural woman Richard's mother, not Henry's, may have been a move based on narrative economy, but it also doubles as a strategy for putting the protagonist into closer proximity to the marvelous,

for giving Richard himself an extraordinary birth. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, he never clearly establishes the true ontological status of Richard's mother, and therefore the incompleteness of his text's internal folklore allows him to retain the textually accredited and presumably orally known marvelous origins of his hero, but all the while without compromising the integrity of his hero-king by making him overtly demonic. In other words, he is able to integrate into his romance the simulacrum of an actual-world folklore with a relatively high level of fidelity, but by translating such a folklore into an amalgam of contradictory fictional facts, he can also create an overdetermined text-world in which the lack of diegetic saturation works to his advantage—that is, it works to allow for both a certain uniformity with extra-textual sources, but also a break from the explicitly infernal origins of the Plantagenet line. And indeed, such a break is necessary for the romance, for while Gerald expects only failure and ruin from a *diabolicum genus*, the *Richard*-Poet's careful negotiation of the demonic legend allows for the successful crusading career of his Christian hero, a king who ultimately paves the way for all other "Crystene-men" to pilgrimage to the Holy Land "wipoute harme or damage" (7195–202).

Another supernatural woman who functions as both fairy mistress and matriarch is Melusine, and like Cassodorien, she too, at least for a time, maintains a certain proximity to the demonic. The English prose version of the romance, following Jean d'Arras's original, begins with an apology in which the author cites Gervase of Tilbury, a man "worshipfull & of credence" who explains how "fayrees toke somtyme the fourme & the fygure of fayre & yonge wymen" in order to seduce human men to take them as brides (2–5).⁴⁴ Then, in order to provide evidence for the existence of such fairies in the actual world, the author gives an "ensaumple" from Gervase, the story of "Sir Robert de Chastel Roussel of the prouince of Asy." The account, as told in *Melusine*, goes that this knight married a "fayree," and as a result he "grew & wexed prosperous fro day to day." But the marriage was contingent on the taboo that he would never see her naked, and when he broke this injunction, "the said nymphe putte her heed in to a watre and was tourned in to a serpent." Sir Robert then "wexed pouere" in a decline equal to his earlier rise, and his fairy bride was never seen again (5–6). As part of the preamble to his romance treatment of the "juste & true cronykle" that records how the "Castell of Lusyggen was

bylded & made of a woman of the fayree,” the author therefore uses the story of Sir Robert as an authenticating device (legitimated through an extra-textual *auctor*) through which he constructs a simulacrum of an actual-world folkloric legend in accordance with the specific story he narrates.⁴⁵ Such a legend, *external* to the internal folklore of the romance yet contained within the text itself, works to create the illusion of historical continuity in accounts of these fairy brides; but what the text conceals is not only that the Sir Robert in *Melusine* is named Sir Raymond (*Raimundus miles*) in Gervase’s account, and therefore that Gervase’s story is less a parallel fairy bride narrative than an early version of the Melusine legend itself, but also that in Gervase’s version the supernatural woman is implicitly linked with the demonic, or at least the quasi-demonic.

In his *Otia Imperialia* Gervase includes the account under the heading “De oculis apertis post peccatum,” in which he first mentions Bede’s discussion of the serpent in the Garden of Eden:

Elegit enim diabolus quoddam genus serpentis femineum uultum habentis, quia similia similibus applaudunt, et mouit ad loquendum linguam eius.

[He claims that the devil chose a particular kind of serpent with a woman’s face, because like approves of like, and then gave its tongue the power of speech.]⁴⁶

Gervase then says that on the subject of serpents, there is a popular tradition (*tradunt uulgares*) that some women change into them, and though it seems remarkable, it is not to be repudiated (*non detestandum*). In relating a reliable account (*ueridica naratione*) he therefore tells the story of Raymond, much like the story given of Robert in *Melusine*, and concludes by noting that, once his wife disappeared in the shape of a serpent, Raymond was deprived of his prosperity and favor.⁴⁷ This quasi-demonic turn in Gervase’s version of the Melusine legend, intended to show the dangers of cavorting with such serpent-women, is consistent with his writings elsewhere on the subject, for he later says that when men become the lovers of women of this sort—“quas fadas nominant”—they lose all worldly prosperity, and Gervase therefore concludes that such women are really angels who sided with the devil during the war in heaven, but since their pride was less grievous, they had been sent to earth “ad hominum penam.”⁴⁸

A similar account of a quasi-demonic serpent-woman appears in Walter Map's story of Henno with-the-teeth, a young knight who encounters a beautiful young woman one day while alone in the forest.⁴⁹ This knight falls in love with her and takes her as his wife, but though she bore him many children, all was not well. She frequently attended church, but avoided holy water and always managed to slip out before the consecration of the Eucharist. Henno's mother noticed this, and suspecting the worst, spied on her one morning while she was in the bath, at which point she discovered Henno's wife had taken the shape of a serpent. She then told her son what she had seen and Henno promptly called a priest. The priest came and, catching her in the bath, sprinkled holy water on her, at which point she flew out through the roof with a loud shriek.⁵⁰ The account is, in many details of narrative and characterization, analogous to the Melusine legend, and most likely derived from the same story or set of stories circulating in the imaginative network out of which the Melusine legend originated. But unlike Melusine, this woman is not explicitly fairy, and indeed her inability to withstand holy water or the sacraments pushes her very strongly toward the demonic. What emerges in the writings of Walter Map and Gervase of Tilbury, therefore, is what appears to be a consistent disposition toward demonizing supernatural women of the Melusine type, and while the *Melusine* text itself conceals this clerical turn in constructing the simulacrum of an imaginative matrix of fairy bride legends, the romance proper (that is, the world *internal* to the romance's narrative) employs a different strategy: it tackles head-on Melusine's demonic potentiality as a way of dispelling it.

In a move consistent with other fairy mistress romances, Raymondin first suspects Melusine of enchanting him, but unlike the supernatural women in *Partonope* or *Desiré*, Melusine immediately makes a firm statement as to her nondemonic character. She says that her powers are not "fauntesye or dyuels werk," but rather that she is "of god," and that her "byleue is as a Catholique byleue oughte for to be" (31). It is a statement that accords with what the audience knows of her lineage through Elynas and Pressine, and Raymondin wholeheartedly believes her.

Later, though, when his brother tells him that the "commyn talking of the peple" is that Melusine is a "spyryte of the fayry" and that every Saturday she "maketh hir penaunce," he grows suspicious and spies on her in the

bath (296).⁵¹ But even when he sees her in half-serpent form, he refuses to entertain any suspicions of her potential demonic affiliations. However, when her son Geoffrey burns down the abbey with another son Froimond inside, his suspicions get the better of him. In thinking of the evils of Geoffrey and the “horriblenes of her son called Horrible,” he remembers her half-serpent nature and the fact that, upon their first meeting, she knew all his “fortune & aventure,” at which point he convinces himself that she might not be what she claimed: “wel I wote certayn it is som spyryt, som fantosme or Illusyon that thus hath abused me” (311).

At this point, therefore, Raymondin considers Melusine’s gifts of her all-male progeny as negative gifts, as *false* gifts from a “fals serpente” that ultimately lead to familial ruin. As he later says to her, “none child that thou hast brought shal come at last to perfection,” and in lamenting that through “arte demonyacle” his most devout son had died at the hands of Geoffrey, he says that “all they that are foursenyd with yre obeye the comandements of the princes of helle” (314–15). But Raymondin immediately regrets his outburst, and begs forgiveness. Melusine does indeed forgive him, but now, apparently because of his breaking of the taboo coupled with this new offense, “almighty god” will no longer permit her to stay, and she departs for good in the shape of a serpent to the great dolor of all the “barons ladyes & damoysselles” who praise her as the “best lady that euer governed ony land” (317). It appears, therefore, that Raymondin’s suspicion of Melusine’s demonic nature reflects a certain clerical tendency to consider these serpent-women as ultimately diabolical. But of course, as a dynastic romance that intends to tell of the “noble yssue & lynne” of the founders of Lusignan, which was commissioned specifically by Jean of Berry, the contemporary holder of the Lusignan castle, it is crucial that the founding mother must not prove to be truly demonic.⁵² Thus, through a careful negotiation of actual-world legends, and through a direct confrontation of assumptions about Melusine’s demonic nature within the text’s internal folklore, the romance deflects Melusine’s diabolic potentiality by ultimately ascribing the fall of the house of Lusignan to the human error based precisely on these assumptions—to Raymondin’s breaking of the taboo and his false incrimination of his fairy mistress.

Dangerous Gifts I: Taboos and the Sovereign Sphere

That Melusine's gifts are not negative gifts, that she does indeed facilitate Raymondin's socioeconomic and dynastic ascension, points to the fact of her nondemonic nature. And that her gifts are dangerous, that there are moments in the text in which they appear to be both a curse and a reward, suggests of her function as a fairy mistress. In *Melusine*, as in nearly all fairy mistress romances, the dangerousness of these gifts is linked to the taboo, and the interestedness of such gifts, their demand for reciprocity, is manifest in the breaking of the conditions of that taboo. But Melusine is rather unusual in this regard, for not only does her taboo not work in conventional fashion (that is, she does not leave immediately after its violation), but the relationship between the gifts and the taboo also does not work as would be expected: the dangerous potentiality of the gifts—that “you & your heyres shall fall litil & litil in decaye” (57)—becomes manifest before the taboo is even broken. Together, though, these two incongruities in the text may go some way in explaining each other. From the beginning Melusine's taboo is not an ordinary one, for its conditions are not set by her alone, but by her mother as punishment for locking her father away in a mountain. This curse, indeed, is emphatically a negative gift. As Pressine says to Melusine: “I gyue to the the gyfte that thou shalt be euery satirday tourned vnto a serpent fro the nauyll dounward.”⁵³ She then says that Melusine must find a husband who will promise never to see her on those days when she is in her secret serpent form, and if she accomplishes this she will not only live and die as a human woman, but also “yssue a fayre lynce, whiche shalbe gret & of highe proesse.” But if she does not, she must return to “tourment & peyne” until the day of judgement (15).

Indeed, the curse itself also works against the grain of demonic serpent-women narratives in *Melusine*'s imaginative network, for in Gervase and Map the prohibitions against seeing the supernatural women in serpent form are based upon the logic that such contact would expose their diabolical nature. In these stories, therefore, the taboo is not arbitrary at a meta-world level, and while this is of course true for Melusine as well, the logic of her taboo is explained through the conditions of the curse. Thus, in this light, the curse functions as a useful narrative device whereby the author can maintain a certain fidelity with other supernatural-bride legends without implying any diabolical origins. And as a result of this manipulation of the logic of the taboo, its eventual violation becomes as dangerous for Melusine as for Raymondin, or more so. What emerges, therefore, is a sly interplay

between possible fictional facts, for when Raymondin breaks the injunction of seeing her on Saturdays, what appears to be the failure of Melusine's taboo is really the failure of Pressine's curse.

At an intra-narrative level there are no logical reasons for the delay in the effects of this curse, nor for why her progeny should, in certain cases, equal less than a "fayre lynee," but there are strong interrelated narrative, political, and human reasons for both. In the narrative space between Raymondin's breaking of the taboo and Melusine's departure Geoffrey burns down the abbey with the monks, including Froimond, inside. And thus there arises within this space the confrontation (through the degeneracy of Melusine's line) and the ultimate dismissal (through her benevolence and alignment with God) of Melusine's potentially demonic nature—a fictional fact that is not only essential for the display of the depth and eventual tragedy of Raymondin's and Melusine's love affair, but also that is central to the romance's political and dynastic intentions. The delay in the effects of the curse, indeed, allows Melusine to outline the future of her descendants: the monstrosity of certain children (including Horryble, who must be "put to deth") provides something of an evident precursor to the foretold difficulties of holding Raymondin's land "in peas" after his death, but the greatness of the other children, namely Raymond, Theoderic, and Geoffrey, points toward the spreading influence of the family.⁵⁴ At both intra- and extra-diegetic levels, therefore, it is necessary that Pressine's curse does not work as it should, for in terms of the romance's ideological concerns it must be shown that she does not in fact spawn a *diabolicum genus*, and in terms of the plot it must be shown that the tragedy of the broken love affair is mutual—and the narrative space between the taboo's violation and its deferred consequences allows for the development of both.

But while in the case of Melusine the author strategically constructs something of a uniquely nonfunctioning taboo, there are other taboos in the romance that do work as they should. The first is the taboo set on Elynas by Pressine, a typically arbitrary and seemingly undemanding condition—"ye shal nat see me during my childbed" (11)—that sets in motion the whole of *Melusine's* narrative action. That such a taboo is central to the romance's plot, and that taboos of this nature are paradigmatic of fairy mistresses, is revealed in the text's preamble. For in discussing how fairies can take the form of beautiful women, the author explains how some men take these fairies as their wives

by meanes of som couenauntes or promysse that they made them to swere vnto them . . . And as long as they kept theyre couenauntes they had good fortune and were euer in prosperyte, but assoone as they faylled of theyr promysse or couenauntes they fell down fro theyr good happ & fortune. (4–5)

It is a passage that highlights the extent to which fairy gifts can amount to “total prestations,” in that they can ultimately result in general “good fortune” and continual “prosperyte,” but it also shows how these accompanying fairy taboos are contradistinctively dangerous, as they lead to total denigration—an equivalent fall from “good happ & fortune.” It is a passage, too, that suggests something of the extent to which taboos in romance *must* be broken, not only due to concerns of narrative economy (why else, then, impose the taboo?), but also because without it, there would be considerably less tension in the narrative, less conflict—fairy mistress romances would typically be just “good happ & fortune”—a thin line on which to hang a plot.

To this point, however, I have been talking about Pressine’s taboo as both arbitrary and dangerous, but perhaps it would be useful to consider the full implications (and diegetic machinations) of these concepts in greater detail. In accord with the transference characteristic of taboos, Pressine’s prohibition operates in such a way as to make her *sacred* while she is in childbed, and in the narrative space during which that taboo is imposed but not broken, the supernatural power invested within this exceptional state suspends itself as pure potentiality. But when Elynas violates the prohibition (that is, when he comes into contact with that which is set apart), the sacredness of the tabooed state transfers over to him, and he himself acquires the characteristics of being prohibited. In other words, he is banned—abandoned by Pressine, but yet, in being produced as a kind of *homo sacer*, he nevertheless remains bound within her sovereign sphere, subject to the full penalty of the taboo’s violation.

But here we may detect some distinctions between cultural taboos and those used in romance. In anthropological contexts such taboos are ritual. That is, they are established and maintained through social constructs, and thus upon the violation of a taboo the only immediate consequences are likewise socially imposed, often taking the form of being expelled from the community or being obligated to undergo some rite of purification.⁵⁵ Thus, in an anthropological or cultural context it may be said that something is taboo because it is presumed unclean or dangerous, but in fairy mistress

romances something is “unclean” or dangerous for no other reason than because it is taboo. Pressine’s injunction shows this relation particularly well. As anthropologists have long known, childbirth taboos (along with menstruation taboos) are related to concerns of literal uncleanness or defilement that come to take on ritual significance.⁵⁶ But in the case of Pressine, at least as constructed within the world of the text, issues of either literal or ritual uncleanness have nothing to do with the prohibition. Like all fairy mistress taboos, it is an entirely arbitrary injunction, without any evident logic behind it, and the supernatural power suspended in the tabooed state comes from her alone, not from any ritualistic customs or beliefs.⁵⁷ Indeed, like all supernatural figures of sovereign power, it is she who arbitrarily decides on the state of exception, on the tabooed state, and just as it is she who sets the conditions of the taboo, it is also she—not some external power—who orchestrates the absolute and equally arbitrary effects upon its violation.

What this results in, therefore, is an intra-narrative literalization of what might be called a traditional, anthropologically understood taboo. That is, the author picks up on the ritual uncleanness of a woman in childbed and constructs the prohibition in such a way as to give it not only a recognizable source, but also concrete and immediate consequences upon its violation. And therefore, the literalization of both the cause and consequences of the taboo, manifest through the fairy mistress’s sovereign decision, gives it a specific and useful function within the narrative. That is, the concreteness of the taboo, and of Elynas’s sacredness upon breaking it, transforms ritual dangerousness into literal or absolute dangerousness, and therefore the violation likewise becomes a literally fixed event, an absolute fictional fact on which the whole of the *Melusine* plot hinges. This concreteness, too, is intimately linked with the gift, for the figurative bind of the gift, its interestedness inherent in a normal reciprocating system, also becomes literalized through the accompanying taboo. And what this absolute taboo reveals, too, is the uniqueness of the giver/gift relation characteristic of fairy mistresses. For Elynas’s bondage to Pressine, the gift—not the gift system—takes on narrative significance in that his failure to reciprocate leads not only to the termination of the relationship (as would happen in any normal gift-exchange system), but also to the loss of the gift itself—a total fall from “good happ & fortune.”

This interplay between literalized taboos and the giver/gift dynamic is also revealed, and in turn manipulated, in *Melusine's* third and final fairy mistress taboo. Melyor, another of Pressine's daughters, is given the negative gift of the castle of Armenia, where she is to preside over the sparrow-hawk adventure. Whoever achieves this adventure, Pressine declares, shall have a "yefte [from Melyor] of suche thinges that men may haue corporelly"—all earthly things, that is, except for Melyor's body. For if the champion should demand her love, he will be "infortunate vnto the ix. lynee," and Melyor will be locked away in a mountain (15–16). Then, in due course, the king of Armenia, descendant of Melusine's son Guyon, successfully completes the challenge with the understanding that he should have all "suche worldly yeftes . . . except only her self." But when Melyor arrives to award the gifts, the king sees her "excellent beaute" and immediately falls in love. He persists in asking to have her as his wife, but realizing that this effectively sets in motion the penalty of the curse, Melyor becomes infuriated: "Thou folyssh kyng, now shalt thou lese the syght of me, & shalt fayll of thy yefte" (366). On account of this curse, therefore, the conventional relationship between fairy gifts and fairy taboos is turned on its head, for what is prohibited by the taboo is precisely the giver/gift dynamic. The one thing the king desires is the very thing he cannot have, and the literalized taboo, contingent on the curse, therefore becomes manifest in Melyor's body—a potentially *real* gift that is simultaneously sacred.

But here again, what appears to be an arbitrary fairy taboo is not arbitrary at all. In this case it is not only due to the fictional fact of the curse, but also, since Melyor is his aunt, because the giving of her body would amount to the taboo of incest, and "holy Chirch wold neuer suffer it" (367). The author therefore constructs one taboo to avoid another, but by developing the narrative so that a seemingly arbitrary taboo (based on a genuinely arbitrary curse) coincides with a cultural or anthropologically understood taboo, he ultimately creates a situation in which the machinations of the fairy's prohibition operate in such a way as to combine the literalness of the taboo's penalty with the figurativeness of ritual defilement.⁵⁸ Thus, by staging the process whereby the giver/gift is irrecoverably lost through the first two taboos in *Melusine*, and by creating an internal folklore in which such an expected giver/gift is literally impossible through the curse (and morally impossible through the incest taboo), the author therefore

manipulates the conventional dynamic of fairy gifts and taboos not only to literalize the dangerousness of fairy mistress gifts within *Melusine's* text-world for narrative purposes, but also to accord with the actual-world facts of the Lusignan line—with the loss of the Lusignan castle during the Hundred Years War, and with the loss of Armenia in 1375.⁵⁹

That sexual access is separated from “worldly riches” is, of course, unusual in fairy mistress romances. In Melyor’s case it is due to the conditions of the curse, and to the ensuing threat of incest, but it is through this denial of the giver/gift, of the impossibility of “total prestations,” that the author can use the taboo as a testing mechanism. The king of Armenia proves himself worthy in achieving the challenge of the sparrow-hawk, but what he does not realize is that embedded within the reward is a further challenge. It is something of a narratological necessity in instances such as this (as romances with demonic or evil temptresses make particularly clear) that what is forbidden is often that which is most desired. Indeed, the taboo object in the sparrow-hawk episode is emphatically not offered, but the scopophilic moment at Melyor’s first appearance, combined with the fact that the king has “al worldly riches ynough,” leads to a situation in which he demands the very thing he was not offered, and cannot have. A similar test occurs in *Thomas of Erceldoune* when Thomas, having travelled three days without sustenance through the dark underground passage, comes to an arbor where he wishes to indulge in its fruit. But this fruit is beset with the ultimate curse of eternal damnation, and his fairy mistress warns him of their dangerousness (187–90). It is a warning Thomas heeds, and indeed, the temptation of the taboo fruit is a test he successfully passes. In these instances, therefore, though the sacred objects are not presented as gifts, they still function as tests through their desirability and potential access. But it is more often the case, both within and beyond romance, that such tests are orchestrated through the explicit offering of taboo objects, through the offering of negative gifts.

Much like the fruit in *Thomas*, there are some supernatural sacred objects in the chronicles that are unsuspected in their illogicality, and the dangerous consequences of accepting them as gifts follow no logical principles. There is no reason, for instance, why King Herla’s accepting of the supernatural dog in Map’s account would lead to his banishment of eternal wandering, nor for why Richard of Sunderland or the peasant in William of Newburgh’s account of the stolen fairy cup must refuse drink from the

adoxie figures who offer it. But what these accounts do show is the incorporative nature of gifts. As Hyde notes, it is precisely because gift exchange is an “erotic” form that so many gifts must be refused, and as these accounts illustrate, supernatural gifts must often be rejected because there are occasionally very real threats in the connections they offer.⁶⁰ In the case of Herla, it seems he could not have anticipated that the dog, as a negative gift (as both a gift-object and a taboo-object), would lead to his abandonment, especially since he had received other gifts from the little red man without any apparent negative consequences. But in the case of Richard and William of Newburgh’s peasant, there seems to be an implicit understanding (Richard had heard of the *vulgaris opinio* of such things) that fairy drink is sacred, and that partaking of it—like the fruit in *Thomas*—would lead to their own sacredness, to their being brought within the adoxic sovereign sphere, to their being banned.

In romance the negative gifts of demonic temptresses and evil enchantresses show the extent to which their incorporativeness—their binding ramifications—can be exceedingly dangerous, and also the extent to which they can function as tests. But there are some negative gifts in romance that are not incorporative in this sense; certainly, they are objects used to facilitate chivalric tests, but because they are magical—not Otherworldly—they do not lead to this same sort of abandonment. Malory includes two such gifts in his *Morte Darthur*. The first is the false Excalibur given to Arthur before doing battle with Accalon. For on his way to the battle,

there com a damesel fromme Morgan le Fay and brought unto sir Arthure a swerde lyke unto Excaliber and the scawberde, and sayde unto Arthure, “She sendis here youre swerde for grete love.” And he thanke hir and wente hit had bene so; but she was falce, for the swerde and the scawberde was counterfete and brutyll and false. (1.140; IV:8)

That it appears to be a genuine gift is evinced in its physical identity to the real Excalibur, in the fact that it is said to be sent “for grete love,” and in the fact that Arthur is happy to receive it at a time when he is particularly in need. But that it truly is a negative gift, a *false* gift that is the product of “false treson,” is revealed not only in the explicitness of this passage, but also by the fact that it is intended to bring about Arthur’s death. It is, indeed, as one part of a scheme in which his opponent is given the real Excalibur, an object that functions as part of a dangerous, magically

orchestrated test, whereby Arthur must fight with a counterfeit sword against the odds (with a little help from the Lady of the Lake) in order eventually to win back the true Excalibur and accordingly win the battle (1.138–48; IV:7–12). The second negative gift, taken from the prose *Tristan*, is the magical drinking horn sent by Morgan to Arthur’s court but rerouted by Lamerok to Mark’s in order to catch Isode in her adultery. This “fayre horne harneyste with golde” has all the allure of a precious gift, and with the bonus “vertu” of helping men spot unfaithful women (the men, of course, do not drink from it). But that it is actually a negative gift is revealed not only in the malevolent intentions of its bestowal, but also in its effects. Only 4 of 100 ladies in Mark’s court pass the test, and when he would have had them all burnt for their treachery, his barons have to step in to prevent the mass slaughter.⁶¹ The barons, indeed, avert attention from the unfaithfulness of their ladies by focusing on the maliciousness of Morgan: it is because the horn is made “by sorcery,” because it came from “the false sorseres and wycche moste that is now lyvyng,” that the results of the test can be ignored, and it is because the “horne dud never good, but caused stryff and bate” that it comes to be recognized, like the false Excalibur, as a negative gift (1.430; VIII:34).⁶²

Perhaps the most dangerous of such negative gifts, both physically and morally, are those offered to Gawain by Bertilak’s wife. Like nearly all dangerous women in romance, she first—and almost immediately—offers him her body: “*3e ar welcum to my cors / Yowre awen won to wale*” (1237–38). But here, as Corinne Saunders points out, Gawain is engaged in a potentially fatal erotic game, of the kind paralleled in the descriptions of Bertilak’s hunts, and on the third day the poet is careful to describe just how dangerous this game really is:

He se3 hir so glorious and gayly atyred,
 So fautles of hir fetures and of so fyne hewes,
 Wi3t wallande joye warmed his hert.
 With smoþe smylyng and smolt þay smeten into merþe,
 þat al watz blis and bonchef þat breke hem bitwene,
 And wynne,
 þay lauced wordes gode,
 Much wele þen watz þerinne.
 Gret perile bitwene hem stod,
 Nif Maré of hir kny3t mynne. (1760–69)

It is essential, as Saunders further notes, that the temptress should be genuinely alluring, and that Gawain should truly desire her, for if his strength in resisting her is to be real, so too must the temptation.⁶³ As is the case with Melyor, here sexual access is accompanied by unforeseeable dangers, and as is the case with demonic temptresses, here it must also be actively denied. But Gawain's true weakness of the flesh, as discussed in the previous chapter, is not in his desire for his host's wife, but instead for the preservation of his own life as his imminent meeting with the Green Knight approaches. It is for this reason that he can refuse the ring she offers as a love-token, and initially the green girdle itself, but when she explains its powers, he understands it as a "juel" that could save him from the "jopardé" that he is to face at the Green Chapel, and he therefore accepts (1855–58). The question of whether or not the girdle really "works," of whether or not it truly has the power to save Gawain from death, is one that the text does not answer. But such a question, it seems, is very much beside the point. For like all the temptations of Bertilak's wife, it is genuinely a negative gift, seductive in its allure and rewarding potentiality, but ultimately intended to ensnare, to spoil—to bring Gawain to moral and, possibly, physical ruin.

This, indeed, is how Gawain understands it in the end. He calls it a "falssyng" (2378), an object that is not only untrue or deceptive, but also treacherous and dangerous. It may, therefore, be useful to think of it as a taboo object, as something set apart that Gawain should not possess, at least after the final exchange of winnings episode, if at all. And like all sacred objects, its power is infective, for now Gawain has become himself "falce," characterized, as he claims, by "trecherye and vntrawpe" (2376–84). In this sense, therefore, it functions less like the negative gifts given by Malory's Morgan than like the Otherworldly negative gifts found in the chronicles and in the romances involving demonic temptresses or evil enchantresses. For like all negative gifts of this sort, it is binding in its incorporativeness, and there is a sense in which Gawain remains bound to the lady who gave it to him. I have argued in the previous chapter that Gawain is marked by his encounter with the adoxic, that in the end he cannot be fully reintegrated into the "broperhede" of his own court, and here I would further argue that it is through the girdle that this figurative bind becomes focused. The girdle, indeed, is a gift that should be refused, but since it is not, it becomes his "token of vntrawpe" (2509), an object that both symbolizes and literally

manifests his “harme” (2511), and in Gawain’s final words he recognizes that such a condition can never be undone: “For þer hit onez is tachched twynne wil hit neuer” (2512).

Dangerous Gifts II: Further Complications

The negative gifts of temptresses, the false gifts that are both alluring and taboo, are always dangerous in romance to the extent that they are incorporative—to the extent that they bind the receiver to the adoxic sphere of the giver. But even the gifts of benevolent fairies in romance can be dangerous in their incorporativeness. One romance that includes both dangerous and negative gifts is *Arthur of Little Britain*, John Bouchier’s early-sixteenth-century translation of the early-fourteenth-century French prose *Artus de Bretagne*. It is, as we have seen, nearly always a point of difficulty in romance for the hero to tell a dangerous gift from a negative one, and in this text there emerges the added complication that both are offered by the same fairy mistress. Indeed, the Fairy Queen Proserpyne offers Arthur gifts of martial (and therefore political) aid: an impenetrable white shield and a sword named Clarence—“the goode swerde of the fairy.”⁶⁴ But she also, in full knowledge of his love for Florence, offers him her sexual favors one night when they are alone in a forest (296–301). It is, indeed, a potentially dangerous erotic game, for what Arthur does not realize at this point in the romance is that Proserpyne and her two fairy companions had also bestowed on Florence, at her birth, the gift that “the best knight of the worlde shall haue her in marriage,” and also that “he shall bere the white sheld and the swerde, and that they shall helpe none other creature but alonely hym” (47–48). Thus, the intra-world logic of these gifts work in such a way that if Arthur had failed in the erotic game, he would not only have lost Florence, but also the aid of Proserpyne, including her supernatural chivalric gifts. In ways reminiscent of Bertilak’s wife, along with the demonic temptresses and evil enchantresses in romance, this temptation episode therefore emerges as a test, and Proserpyne’s offering of her body likewise emerges as the negative gift through which that test is orchestrated. It is, though, a test that Arthur successfully passes, and when he and Florence are finally alone together, Proserpyne appears to assure Florence that Arthur is “the moost true louter that lyueth; for I haue ryghte well proued hym.” She then goes on to explain

how that she had desyred his loue in the forest . . . and there dyd as moche as she coude to entyse his mynde to cause hym to loue her; and also how she made other to tempte hym; and how all that wolde not auayle, for alwayes he was in one ferme poynt. (360–61)

It appears in this romance, therefore, that Proserpyne is less a fairy mistress than a fairy matron, working between Arthur and Florence to bring about their marriage and eventual rise in their chivalric and feudal worlds.⁶⁵ But Proserpyne's gifts, though *real*, are also interested, and her demand for some form of reciprocity—that he maintain his status as “the best knight of the worlde”—effectively binds Arthur to her sovereign sphere. To complicate this incorporativeness, however, is the negative gift included in the erotic game that actively challenges Arthur's trouthe, and therefore, his ability to meet the demands of Proserpyne's interested gifts. Thus, as it is precisely the accepting of the negative gift that would bring about the dangerous potentiality of the dangerous gifts, the negative gift works to emphasize the potential volatility of Proserpyne's otherwise benevolent supernatural aid, and through this testing process, it works to show just how good a knight Arthur really is.

In *Huon of Burdeux*, another of John Bouchier's English translations, Oberon functions in many ways like Proserpyne—as a supernatural patron to the hero. The romance begins when Huon is sent on an assuredly fatal quest by Charlemagne after inadvertently killing the Emperor's son. But Oberon, since he has the power to know “all that ever any man can knowe or thynke, good or yll,” recognizes Huon's faultlessness and promises to aid him in his quest “by cause of the trouthe that is in thee” (72–73). Then, as with Proserpyne, he endows him with supernatural chivalric accoutrements—a cup that is continually full and a horn that immediately summons Oberon and his fairy host to battle. Throughout Huon's adventures, too, Oberon is always in the hinterland, ready to intervene whenever Huon finds himself in an impossible position, and, at the end of the romance, Oberon endows him with the ultimate chivalric honor, naming him (even above King Arthur) as the new ruler of the fairy realm. It is a title that carries with it extreme supernatural powers—all the powers of fairyland, in fact—which Huon readily calls upon, for example, to ensure the marriage of his daughter to the prince of Aragon (599). In an instance of ultimate political and military ascension, therefore, Huon inherits powers beyond the bounds of ordinary socioeconomic and martial structures, and, accordingly, as

Matthew Woodcock notes, the romance as a whole emerges as “a wish-fulfilment of supreme sovereign power.”⁶⁶

But like all fairy gifts, Oberon's are interested, and the demand for the reciprocation of these *real* gifts become manifest in the conditions of the taboos with which they are attached. Indeed, Huon must always speak the truth for his supernatural cup to work, and he must only use his horn to summon Oberon when he is truly in need of help. Beyond these specific prohibitions, too, the binding powers of the gifts are also manifest in more generalized injunctions (here, perhaps, more like Irish *geasa* than anywhere else in romance): that Huon will keep his oath to remain chaste before marriage, and that he will generally maintain his standard of *trouthe*—like Arthur in *Arthur of Little Britain*, he must always strive to be “the best knight of the worlde.” But what is peculiar about this romance is the extent to which these taboos continually fail to work as would be expected. At each violation, nothing seems to happen at all, except that Huon may have to endure for a time without Oberon's supernatural assistance. Oberon may appear to him—sometimes long after the fact—in order to give a warning, but ultimately he forgives without penalty. In a rare instance Huon does have to endure an extended bout of ill fortune when he violates Oberon's injunction to chastity, since he is shipwrecked and tortured by pirates, but eventually Oberon comes around to send him aid (152–70). There is, therefore, never a sense in which the sacredness of the concrete or absolute supernatural taboo transfers over to Huon upon its violation. Certainly, taboos are shown to follow this principle within the romance's internal folklore, since Huon meets a knight, early in the romance, who is forced to endure a thirty-year stint as a sea monster after violating one of Oberon's prohibitions (111), but as to why they do not work in this fashion when it comes to Huon is, at least at an intra-diegetic level, not entirely clear.

From an extra-narrative perspective, however, these apparently nonfunctioning taboos may have something to do with the machinations of the plot, and with the development of the hero. The trials Huon undergoes throughout the romance, as Helen Cooper points out, have almost as much to do with his breaking of Oberon's taboos as with any threat from his enemies, and in this light the nonfunctioning taboos may be seen as facilitating something akin to what Cooper calls nonfunctioning magic. That is, the leniency of the taboos allows for a string of incidents in which their violations lead not to any form of banishment, but rather more simply

to Oberon's temporary neglect—to the temporary failure of the supernatural gifts. In this sense, therefore, the gifts still maintain their status as dangerous gifts in that they contain a certain volatility in their inability to give aid when it is most needed, but it is precisely this volatility that forces Huon to undertake trials and overcome enemies through ordinary human means. And thus, like nonfunctioning magic, they focus narrative attention on the human, on the prowess of the knight, not the fortunate assistance of supernatural objects.⁶⁷

Connected to this focus on the human, however, is the problem of Huon's inherent chivalric excellence. Indeed, as Cooper further notes, Huon's *trouthe* is a given in the romance, affirmed by Oberon who has the supernatural power to know the hero's inner self.⁶⁸ But this insistence on Huon's intrinsic virtue seems to run contrary to his continual breaking of Oberon's injunctions. Huon is, though, merely human, fallible after all, and romances can often use momentary lapses in perfect *trouthe* to show just how good—though not faultless—a knight really is, as seems to be the case in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. But what is remarkable about *Huon* is precisely the persistence of the hero's fallibility, and of Oberon's according clemency. Indeed, the Green Knight may be ultimately forgiving of Gawain's single offense, but Oberon is repeatedly forgiving of Huon throughout the romance, and it is this persistent favoring, antithetical to the logic of the taboos, that culminates in his eventual rise to the throne of the fairy realm. The implication here is that fairies have that second sight to see the true goodness of characters when the opinions within the human world of the text seem to support the contrary. Melusine, for instance, much like Oberon, initially appears to Raymondin after he inadvertently kills his uncle while trying to protect him from a wild boar, and her first favor is to help him out of this predicament. Tryamour, too, bestows her gifts on Launfal when the Arthurian court fails him. Known for giving “gyftys largelyche” (28), he is praised by all for his “largesse & hys bounté” (31), but when Guinevere continually fails to reciprocate in her own gift-giving, the fairy mistress recognizes his virtue and responds with her own magnanimity.⁶⁹ In the late-twelfth-century *Graelent* as well, a possible source for *Launfal*, the hero receives the gifts of his fairy mistress at the very time when he unjustly falls out of favor with the court—when the king withholds his pay after he is falsely slandered by the queen for refusing her adulterous advances (148–60).

In these romances, unlike *Huon*, the emphasis is on the socioeconomic aid that accompanies the erotic favors of the fairy mistress, and in this sense they come closest to approximating pure wish-fulfillment. Indeed, fantasies of this sort would have held a certain *cachet* with that group Duby projected as the primary audience for these romances—the landless young men who were, like Raymondin, Launfal, and Graellent, *juvenes*, or bachelors.⁷⁰ The introduction of the right of primogeniture in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had sweeping consequences. All was fine, at least in theory, for the eldest son, who was all but assured social and financial security. But younger sons were not so lucky; to a large extent they had to fend for themselves, and their only course of socioeconomic ascension was to somehow convince an heiress (or the father of an heiress) that they would be a desirable match. Compounding the difficulties for these younger sons was the fact that the aristocracy at this time was something of an “open class”; that is, it was a class that recruited large numbers of nonaristocratic men skilled in war and administration in order to defend and operate its increasingly complex system of rule.⁷¹ In short, this augmented nobility quickly amassed a surplus of males, all of whom, Duby argues, “were on the lookout for heiresses.”⁷² Accordingly, as Erik Kooper notes, these knights frequented the great courts, participated in all the tournaments they could, and congregated at the houses of available heiresses. But as Kooper, following Duby, further remarks, these bachelors faced rather tough odds; tournaments had few champions, and flirtation with an heiress (who could, of course, marry only one of her suitors) was spoiled by the constant presence of chaperones who worked to preserve the reputation of the young lady for future marriage.⁷³ These young men, therefore, must have been a frustrated group, not only socially and economically but sexually as well, and the fantasy of a fairy mistress, representing what we might call the superlative form of the human heiress, would have provided an imaginative solution to all such frustrations.

There are, as Elizabeth Archibald notes, a suspicious number of available heiresses in romance, who are both wealthy and beautiful, and who choose their husbands and lovers as they please.⁷⁴ Indeed, heroines of this sort, possessing passion and agency, seem to have served as a generic marker for romance, early in Anglo-Norman and later in English.⁷⁵ And it could be argued, too, that there are also a suspicious number of fairy mistresses in

romance who could represent the ultimate fantasy of the knights of the lesser nobility. *Melusine* may be the most forthright about this aspect of its fairy mistress's function. Indeed, as Jacques Le Goff argues, Melusine is "the fairy of medieval economic growth," and as such, she works as both a pioneer and a builder, clearing land in rural areas and building (even with her own hands) fortified castles and cities for Raymondin and his descendants. Melusine thus emerges as a mechanism of socioeconomic wish-fulfillment; as a figure capable of such influence, she becomes the "symbolic and supernatural incarnation" of knightly ambition, bringing land, castles, and cities (and abundant progeny) to her chosen knight in such a way as to echo the fantasies of an aristocratic audience.⁷⁶

If, however, Melusine is the fairy of medieval economic growth, the fairy mistresses of *Graelent* and *Launfal* are the fairies of medieval economic endowment. Tryamour, like Graelent's fairy mistress, may not cater to the fantasies of familial or dynastic affairs, but she does function to aid Launfal in achieving socioeconomic success. With these gifts, Launfal, like Graelent, quickly rises in his chivalric world, and, accordingly, soon regains his place in Arthur's court. It is a place, as mentioned, that Launfal by all rights deserves, for Tryamour uses her powers to right the pains caused by Guinevere's undeserving mistreatment. There is an obvious appeal to fantasy in such extreme benefaction, a fantasy that contradistinctively reflects the gift-giving activities in the human world of the text. That the particular characteristic of Launfal's chivalric virtue is his largesse has already been noted, and in *Graelent* the hero is distinguished as a *bons chevaliers* because "Bons ostex tenoit et sovent, / Et si donoit molt largement" (25–26) [He often entertained in his lodgings / And gave very generous gifts].⁷⁷ But when these gifts are not reciprocated, when there is no equivalent largesse on the part of the king or queen, these funds dry up, and like all gift-exchange systems operating in the human world, this lack of reciprocity leads to the termination of relationships. It is a structural and thematic congruency within these text-worlds, therefore, that Launfal's and Graelent's fairy mistresses provide what their human worlds fail to give—and that in abundance. As is also the case in *Desiré*, however, what initially appears to be pure wishfulfillment is complicated in these texts through the taboo, and the troubling potentiality of these dangerous gifts becomes manifest when the sacredness of that which is prohibited is transferred to the heroes, when they are abandoned, tabooed, by their fairy mistresses.⁷⁸

In *Launfal* this becomes the hero's "doble wo" (758), as his violation not only results in his abandonment by his fairy mistress, but also in his being banned by Arthur and his court. In *Landevale* and Marie's original the hero's mistress simply disappears, but *Launfal* describes the loss of his material possessions: his money, horse, and knave. He does retain his armor, but it changes from being "whyte as flour" to dark black (742–43), a transformation that not only reflects the loss of its supernatural properties, but also symbolizes his banishment from the fairy who gave it to him. In *Graelent*, too, the hero is imprisoned by the king for the same offense that leads to his abandonment by his mistress (for publicly claiming his beloved is more beautiful than the queen, 498–507). And in *Desiré*, though the abandonment of the fairy mistress does not coincide with a banishing in the human world, it does bring him to physical ruin, to the extent that he, along with everyone else, is sure he will die (391–404).⁷⁹

It is, as noted previously, something of a narratological necessity that the dangerous potentiality of such dangerous gifts is eventually revealed—typically, in fact, not long after they are first given. Certainly, *Launfal* and *Graelent* face troubles from their own courts, but in these romances the banishment in the human world is intimately linked with the giver/gift and the conditions attached to that supernatural gift (both in the prohibition and the penalty connected to it). And in *Desiré* the narrative's only conflict is enacted by the breaking of the taboo, once the threat of demonic origins has been ruled out. In romances that would otherwise be pure fantasy, therefore, embedding the narrative's source of conflict within the object of potential wish-fulfillment proves to be a rather useful—and in many ways essential—narrative device. "Happy love," as Denis de Rougemont notes, "has no history," and romance, both as an ideal and as a narrative form, feeds on obstacles, as otherwise there would simply be no stories to tell; such romances, indeed, would simply be "good happ & fortune."⁸⁰

In this sense, therefore, fairy gifts can produce narrative complications not only in their dangerousness, but also, counterintuitively, in their potential to be ultimately rewarding. Even when there seem to be no moral or ethical issues at stake (as there are at Hautdesert), knights are not meant to live in luxury; not only is it bad for their chivalric careers, but it is also bad for the romances in which these careers are narrated. Nor (for the same reasons) should they be in peaceful and happy marriages—at least, that is, until their romance's end. Marriage, as Neil Cartlidge notes, "almost only

ever becomes a literary theme when it is problematised in some way,” and along these lines marriage in romance could be extended to love affairs generally.⁸¹ Love that exists outside a consistent and content relationship—that sort of love that is still seeking fulfillment—may spur a knight on to undertake heroic endeavors, but once that relationship is secured (and the fulfillment obtained), there is, in most cases, no reason to continue with further chivalric exploits. As Cartlidge further notes, this sort of fulfillment “generally marks the end of individual endeavour in both senses of the word: it represents both the prize and the conclusion of the hero’s career.”⁸² This is precisely the problem that arises in Chrétien’s *Erec et Enide*, in which Erec fights heroically in winning Enide, but after their marriage,

N’avoit mes soing de tornoier:

A sa fame volt dosnoier. (2399–400)

[He no longer cared for tourneying:

He wanted to enjoy his wife’s company.]⁸³

Indeed, Erec enjoys his bedtime luxuries so much that he becomes content to stay in bed most of the day (2442–43), an attitude that the members of Arthur’s court, not least Enide herself, cannot condone. It is this sort of knightly inactivity, brought about by the excessive indulgence in the luxuries of love, that later causes Malory’s Lancelot to speak disparagingly about his suitability for marriage:

But for to be a weddyd man, I thynke hit nat, for than I muste couche with hir and leve armys and turnamentis, batellys and adventures. (1.270; VI:10)

In this regard, the gifts of fairy mistresses, often including or leading to realms of bliss and leisure, place knights in positions where they cannot engage in the activities of chivalry. This works to create something of an apparent incongruity, as knights may truly desire the favors of a fairy mistress, but once those favors are bestowed upon them, things may not be as well as they had originally hoped.

Following *Erec et Enide*, for example, Chrétien’s *Yvain* includes a scene in which Gawain chides Yvain for his idleness in marriage, and encourages him to avoid the trap of easy living (2486–504). As Gawain says in the English version:

Sir, if þou ly at hame,
Wonderly men wil þe blame.
þat knyght es nothing to set by,
þat leues al his chevalry
And ligges bekeand in his bed,
When he haves a lady wed. (1455–60)

Iwain then leaves Alundine to take up his arms, but under the taboo that he must return to his wife before a year expires, a prohibition to which he fails to adhere. In a similar way Partonope must choose between Melior's marvelous realm and his native France. After his initial meeting with Melior he spends his days in leisure—hunting in her forests and lounging in her bedroom—but after twelve months pass he itches to return to native soil. Melior then tells him that King Clovis is dead and that his enemies have invaded France—news that motivates Partonope to return home all the more quickly. Melior grants him leave, but only on the condition that he returns to her once the war is over, and throughout the remainder of the romance Partonope finds himself continually conflicted about where he wishes to be—either with his mistresses in her realm of leisure or with his troops at war.

Taking these complications to their logical ends is the marvelous imprisonment of the *Val sans Retour*, a place where the humanized Morgan of the prose *Lancelot* entraps knights who have been unfaithful in love. Like most fairy (or humanized-fairy) realms it is a place of comfort, where all the luxuries of courtly life are available. But it is, too, a place where knights are deprived of the possibility of performing knightly deeds. It is, therefore, a realm where a knight cannot do all that knighthood requires of him, and as such, it emerges as a place to be avoided at all costs, a place of imprisonment and evil enchantment.⁸⁴ Malory excludes the *Val sans Retour* from his rendition of this material, but he does include episodes that highlight the entrapment tendencies of his humanized Morgan. Arthur, Urien, and Accalon, for example, become separated from their companions in the course of a stag hunt, and near nightfall they meet twelve beautiful damsels who welcome them aboard their ship, serve them “all wyne and metys” imaginable, and lead them to luxurious couches for the night. But these are “false damysels”—“fendis and no women,” as Accalon believes—who use their “inchauntementes” to deceive knights. For in the morning, when Urien awakes, he is in Camelot with Morgan; when Accalon awakes

he is “by a depe welles side within half a foote, in grete perell of deth”; and when Arthur awakes he finds himself in a “durke preson” (1.137–40; IV:6–8).⁸⁵ In *Lybeaus Desconus*, too, another romance attributed to Thomas Chestre, the “euell” enchantress Dame d’Amour entraps the hero through her crafts by convincing him that he is “In paradys alyue” (1431), and “Wyth fantasme and fayrye / þus sche blerede hys y3e” (1432–33), to the extent that he is imprisoned in her tower for over a year.

Episodes such as these, in which knights are ensnared through the seduction of beautiful women and the allure of luxurious living, shows the close intra-generic proximity between enchantresses, demonic temptresses, and fairy mistresses, and accordingly, why knights would be expected to be initially suspicious that any marvelous gift may indeed be a negative one. But with the exception of Nenyve’s imprisonment of Merlin, these episodes always end in the release of the knight from the enchanted trap, for much like Iwain’s and Partonope’s departures from their ladies’ realms, escapes such as these are something of a narratological inevitability. As Merlin’s final episode illustrates, entrapment without release marks the end of narrative action, and it does so in much the same way that marriage without complication, as Malory’s Lancelot fully understands, would lead to the end of a chivalric career.

For this reason the ending of *Launfal* may be seen, at least for the hero, as potentially problematic. When Tryamour—in another form of diegetically arbitrary adoxic mercy—simultaneously frees Launfal from both her supernatural banishment and his ban within the human world, he opts to follow her to her fairy realm where he is to reside indefinitely. Such a move poses the idea that there is space for fulfillment outside the chivalric world, and indeed a common reading of the *Launfal* romances is that they work as a vehicle for courtly critique. But for a man as eager to participate in knightly pursuits as Launfal (the *Launfal* version emphasizing his martial activities throughout), there remains the notion that, in the end, the fairy realm may not be able to provide him with all that he desires.⁸⁶ In a turn intended to rectify this problem of the separateness and potential idleness of the fairy realm, therefore, Chestre’s version leaves space for Launfal to return once a year, both to participate in chivalric activities and, accordingly, to further his name:

Euery er, vpon a certayn day,

Me may here Launfales stede nay,
And hym se wyth syȝt.
Ho þat wyll þer axsy justus,
To kepe hys armes fro þe rustus,
Jn turnement oþer fyȝt,
Dar he neuer forþer gon;
þer he may fynde justes anoon
Wyth Syr Launfal þe knyȝt. (1024–32)

It is an addition to the earlier versions of the romance that, in effect, attempts to give Launfal the best of both human and fairy worlds—the ultimate of all possible fulfillment. It is one, though, that the later *Sir Lambewell* does not replicate. Following *Lanval* and *Landevale*, Lambewell departs with his mistress to Avalon, and is subsequently never heard from again:

Further of him hard noe man,
Nor more of him tell can.⁸⁷ (627–28)

With less of an emphasis on the hero's desire for martial activities, these versions of the story are content with leaving the hero permanently separated from his courtly and chivalric world, and he is accordingly satisfied with “all manner of thing / that euer might be to his liking” (625–26) in his mistress's Otherworld.

The same holds true in *Desiré*, for at the end he departs with his beloved for good, and in the final lines we are told that he had no desire to return:

Desirrez monte, si s'en va
O s'amie qui l'en mena.
O li remest en tel maniere
Que puis ne retorna ariere;
De retorner n'ot il plus cure. (815–19)
[Desiré mounted and left
With his beloved, who took him away.
He remained with her in such a way
That he never came back;
He no longer had any desire to return.]

Graelent, too, desires to be with his mistress in her realm. Though he had been warned to stay away, he attempts to cross the river that separates the

human world from the Otherworld, and although he nearly drowns, his fairy mistress—showing her adoxic mercy—eventually rescues him and takes him to her palace, never to be seen again. Graelent's horse, though, does not make it across the river, and, as the narrator tell us, could still be heard neighing in the region for many years after. It is a remnant in the natural landscape that serves as an intra-world reminder of the knight's adventure and his subsequent departure with his mistress (752–53)—a reminder that points simultaneously to his nonpresence in the human world and to his supernaturally extended life, a reminder that works to make Graelent, like Launfal, a remnant of the past in his own story—a part of his own romance's internal folklore.

In many ways the late-twelfth-century *Guingamor* follows this pattern, though perhaps even more than in *Launfal*, there is some indication that the hero might not be content in the Otherworld realm in which he ends up. Lost in the course of hunting a mysterious white boar, Guingamor comes across a woman bathing naked in a pool. Much like Graelent, he initially steals her clothes, but he soon returns them in order to continue with the hunt. The lady, though, wishes him to stay:

Je vos promet loiaument
Que le sengler pris vos rendrai
Et le brachet vos bailleraï
A porter en vostre païs
Jusqu'a tierz jor; je vos pelvis. (470–74)
[I promise you faithfully
That I will deliver to you the captured boar
And I shall give you the brachet
To take back to your land
After three days; I give you my word.]

Her promise, however, is a trap. He is taken to an extravagant and luxurious palace where he can enjoy the delights of the Otherworld, but once three days have passed and he wishes to leave, his mistress tells him that in actuality 300 years have passed in his world, and that, of course, the king and all his companions have long been dead. But Guingamor insists on seeing for himself. He takes the head of his boar, the spoils of his hunt, and crosses over into the human world, and, once on the other side, he soon

encounters a woodsman who corroborates the fairy mistress's claim—that his companions have been dead for 300 years. He also adds:

Teus i a de la vielle gent
Qui racontent assez sovent
De ce roi et de son neveu,
Que il avoit merveilles preu:
Dedenz ceste forest chaça,
Mes onques puis ne retorna. (603–608)

[There are some of the old folk
Who often say
Of that king and his nephew,
That he was extremely brave;
That he hunted in this forest,
But never returned afterwards.]

Guingamor, then, has no choice but to return to the Otherworld. When he does, though, he leaves with the woodsman the boar's head he brought along—a physical reminder, like Graellent's steed and Launfal's yearly return for battle, not only of his continual existence in the fairy realm, but also of his past presence in the human world.⁸⁸ Like Graellent and Launfal, Guingamor becomes, in effect, part of his own romance's internal folklore. His concern for renown at court, exhibited by his returning with the boar's head, becomes frustrated by the effects of supernatural time, and, as a precursor to the imprisoning tendencies of humanized fairies in later romances, he becomes alienated—entrapped—in his fairy mistress's realm of luxury and leisure. The gifts of the fairy mistress in Guingamor, therefore, stray very close to purely negative gifts, for indeed he is banned, made permanently sacred, through accepting her gift of the captured boar. In his desire for renown he thus accepts a gift that leads to his abandonment within the supernatural woman's adoxic sovereign sphere, a banishment that, like the manipulation of time in Map's account of Herla, does not allow for any possibility of recovery or release.

It would seem, then, that with all their appeal to fantasies of sexual satisfaction, socioeconomic aid, and blissful and leisurely living, fairy mistress romances should end in complete fulfillment. But as it turns out, things do not always end quite so well for the heroes of these romances, and, indeed, even when they do end in ostensibly happy circumstances, there may still remain some questions as to just how truly happy those

endings really are. By interrogating the notion of fairy mistresses as figures of pure wish-fulfillment, this chapter has focused on the dangerousness of fairy gifts in order to expose their potential to be both rewarding and hazardous, not least in conjunction with taboos. And though the existence of such taboos have long been acknowledged, this study has sought to question more deeply their narratological functions, to investigate the ways the concreteness of unique supernatural prohibitions lead to the very sacredness of the knights who violate them. But fairy taboos in romance are always conditions of supernatural favors, of gifts, and this chapter has also developed a theory of gifts and gift-exchange systems based on the unique incorporativeness of the giver/gift relation. It has exposed the persistent construction of a dynamic in romance in which gifts can be both *real* and paradoxically interested—in which they can be exceptionally rewarding in their supernatural extravagance, but also exceedingly dangerous in the potentiality of their infective sacredness. In a system that combines the machinations of supernatural gifts with the logic of taboos, therefore, fairy mistresses never emerge as simple vehicles of wish-fulfillment. Rather, they function as complex narrative devices who can arbitrarily reward, abandon, and forgive, who can provide for that which will lead to a happy ending, but who can also challenge and disrupt along the way.

CONCLUSION

The one fairy realm of potential wish-fulfillment not discussed in the previous chapter is Avalon. Of all such realms it may be the most idealized, the most straightforwardly rewarding, but like so many other supernatural realms of both fairy mistresses and enchantresses, there still remains a tension in its idleness and separateness. Such tension remains not because it is in any way a realm of potential entrapment, but because its reward is based on the supernatural extension of life, and therefore, its idealization is predicated on the possibility of return to the human world. The Avalon motif, indeed, shows precisely why departure to the fairy realm marks the end of narrative action, but in this case such an end is idealized through the close proximity between Arthurian romance and history, for the rewarding potentiality of Avalon is always suspended beyond the end of the text, and beyond history itself.¹ In romances not aligned with the simulacra of actual-world folklore, however, since the simultaneity of the narrative's end and the permanent departure from the human world is a narratological inevitability, some authors had to be inventive to construct an intra-world logic—perhaps best understood as an illogic—that would allow for the continuation of their heroes' careers beyond a first meeting in the Otherworld. In all such cases—as found in *Guigemar*, *Partonope*, *Iwain and Gawain*, *Generides*, and *Eger and Grime*—such a logic is based on the construction of an incomplete or incoherent internal folklore in which presumed supernatural women are humanized in the course of their narrative's unfolding.

Such manipulations of possible fictional facts—and even the suspended indeterminacy of contradictory fictional facts beyond the end of the narrative—stand as a testament, I argue, to the inventiveness of romance authors as they play with the conventions of fairies to produce unique figures and episodes to facilitate their narrative needs. Such an argument, it must be said, runs counter to nearly every other major study of fairies in

medieval romance over the past 100 years and more.² Indeed, it directly opposes those readings. Where I read the presentation of contradictory fictional facts as part of the construction of a strategically designed incomplete internal folklore existing within an autonomous text-world, Loomis, Paton, and their cohorts read them as authorial failings—as degenerations of ur-myths, or ur-fairies, through which it is revealed that these authors did not understand the mythic complexities of the ancient materials they were dealing with, and therefore confused these borrowed elements as they attempted to conform them with the conventions of romance. There is a sense, perhaps, in which this interpretation has a certain cryptic allure, but ultimately it fails on two interrelated fronts. For not only is this approach severely limited in considering how fairies function in romance, in thinking about the ways they are utilized and developed within unique text-worlds, but it is also difficult to accept that romance authors writ large—from Chrétien to Marie de France to the *Gawain*-Poet, to name but a few—failed to understand the ramifications of contradictory elements in their constructions of complex and dynamic fictive worlds.

It is, indeed, precisely on these elaborate world-constructing strategies that this book has focused. In drawing on a range of interrelated approaches, it has not only developed a theoretical framework for analyzing the unique qualities that fairies bring to the worlds of their texts, but it has also, through this process, made the role of the author central in this discussion. By introducing the concept of internal folklore, borne out of textual theorizations of possible worlds, it has emphasized the singularity of each romance through an assessment of how authors achieve particular narrative effects by picking up conventions and motifs circulating in their imaginative networks and manipulating them to serve their specific narrative needs. Indeed, latent within this argument is a call for further considerations of what I have called a new intentionality, a narratologically based consideration of the world-constructing powers of the author. Such an approach, as this book has shown, is critically useful, for by focusing on narrative strategies in thinking about the creation of a literary work, it provides a new way of understanding the complex ways in which an author can achieve unique narrative and aesthetic effects by manipulating imaginative conventions.

When it comes to fairies in medieval romance, these effects are particularly unique, for while the alternative fairy worlds in romance do

indeed develop intra-generic and intertextual correspondence across texts and across time, they are primarily characterized by their unknowableness, by the persistent singularity of their exception from human logic. Indeed, what makes fairies in romance most distinctive—their mysteriousness, their arbitrariness, and ultimately their adoxicity—is also what makes them particularly interesting in their adaptability, in their potential to be used by authors to do a vast range of things that would not normally be possible with more traditionally orthodox figures. This book has endeavored to map the most significant of these possibilities, though in view of the inherent arbitrariness of fairies, combined with the singularity of each romance text-world, it cannot be exhaustive. Certainly, considerations of these two aspects open up whole new vistas for further investigation, and from this perspective this book serves as an experiment for considering the critical usefulness of reading fairies not as folkloric curiosities, nor as mythic remnants from a Celtic past, but as complex and cleverly designed narrative devices that become ideologically central to the concerns of romance throughout the Middle Ages.

NOTES

Introduction: Internal Folklore

1. See, for example, Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Thomas Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1986); Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Ruth Ronen, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Lubomír Doležal, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
2. See Claude Bremond, "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities," *New Literary History* 11 (1980): 387–411; Ronen, *Possible Worlds*, esp. pp. 5–16; also, Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 106–97.
3. See Nicholas Rescher, "The Ontology of the Possible," in *Logic and Ontology*, ed. Milton Munitz (New York: New York University Press, 1973), pp. 213–28. Rescher notes the indispensability of language in the creation of these mental constructs. See also, David Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978): 37–46.
4. Ronen, *Possible Worlds*, p. 8. See also, Doležal, *Heterocosmica*, pp. 19–20.
5. J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *Tree and Leaf* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 23 [3–81].
6. Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 8.
7. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 33.
8. It is also, as *Thomas of Erceldoune* illustrates, a realm distinct from the three afterlife realms of medieval Christian theology. *Thomas of Erceldoune*, ed. J. A. H. Murray, EETS o.s. 61 (London: N. Trübner, 1875), pp. 6–7.
9. Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 173–74.
10. Due to the methodological difficulties in reconstructing folkloric practices or beliefs (past or present) in the actual world, "folklore" has become something of an uncomfortable word in recent criticism. My use of the term, however, modified by "internal" and referring only to intra-diegetic phenomena, avoids those methodological complications inherent in traditional analyses of folklore.
11. See Ryan, *Possible Worlds*, pp. 54–57; also, Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1990), esp. pp. 57–69. The concept of minimal departure also points to both the problems and the possibilities of considering representations of fairies in their romance text-worlds in relation to conceptions of fairies in the actual world. Indeed, it seems there is some sort of continuity, as the folklorists insist, between fairies in romance and fairies in folkloric culture (if it is possible to

take, for instance, the accounts of Walter Map, Gervase of Tilbury, and Thomas Walsingham as evidence of fairy beliefs and/or ideas in their respective cultures at large). But even if we could reconstruct these beliefs or ideas, they could only tell us so much about how fairies operate in romance, since romances are under no compulsion to abide by the postulates of these beliefs.

12. See Umberto Eco, "Report on Session 3: Literature and Arts," in *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts and Sciences: Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 65*, ed. Sture Allén (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), p. 352 [343–55].
13. For a general study of Anglo-Saxon elves, see Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007).
14. *Catholicon Anglicum*, ed. Sidney Herrtage, EETS o.s. 75 (London: N. Trübner, 1881), p. 113; Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, ed. and trans. S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 424–25; Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, rev. C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 154–61 and 344–45; Etienne de Rouen, "Epistola Arturi Regis ad Henricum Regum Anglorum," in *Latin Arthurian Literature*, ed. and trans. Mildred Leake Day (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2005), pp. 248–49 [236–57]. See [chapter 1](#) for more on the theological explanation given for the existence of fairies, and [chapter 2](#) for a discussion of Laȝamon's elves.
15. As Helen Cooper suggests, fairies in medieval romance did not require belief, but they "probably needed rather less suspension of disbelief." Cooper, *Romance*, p. 174.
16. Alaric Hall, however, argues for a greater degree of continuity between pre- and post-conquest beliefs in/conceptions of elves, though the evidence is too sparse to consider how, in pre-conquest England, they might have been engaged with imaginatively. See Hall, *Elves*, esp. pp. 75–95; also, Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
17. Spenser, of course, treated his fairies very seriously, though it seems he can get away with this in large part because he allegorizes them. For a study of fairies in renaissance England, especially Spenser's, see Matthew Woodcock, *Fairy in the Faerie Queene: Renaissance Elf-Fashioning and Elizabethan Myth-Making* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); and Minor White Latham, *The Elizabethan Fairies: The Fairies of Folklore and the Fairies of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930).
18. Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les Fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine: La Naissance des Fées* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1984), pp. 372–73.
19. Doležel considers this attention to the "world-constructing activity of human minds" to be one of the primary advantages of thinking about fictional narratives in terms of possible worlds. See Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, pp. ix–xii.
20. Lucy Allen Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance: Enlarged by a Survey of Scholarship on the Fairy Mythology Since 1903 and a Bibliography by Roger Sherman Loomis*, 2nd ed (New York: Burt Franklin, 1960); J. A. MacCulloch, *Medieval Faith and Fable* (London: George G. Harrap, 1932); John Revell Reinhard, *The Survival of Geis in Mediaeval Romance* (Verlag: Max Niemeyer, 1933). For a characteristic sampling of Roger Sherman Loomis's work on this subject, see *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927).
21. C. S. Lewis, "The Anthropological Approach," in *C. S. Lewis: Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 301–12.
22. C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1964), esp. pp. 122–38.
23. Cooper, *Romance*, esp. pp. 173–217.

24. See Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2010), p. 4.

1 Fairies and Humans between Possible Worlds

1. *Prose Merlin*, ed. John Conlee (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), p. 274.
2. Saunders notes that the word “nigromancy” finds its origins in the Latin *niger* (black), rather than in the Greek *nekros* (corpse), from which the modern “necromancy” is derived. Necromancy is the art of magic conducted through the powers of the dead. For a full discussion see Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, pp. 154–58.
3. For a recent discussion of Morgan and her “sisters” (namely the Lady of the Lake, Morgause, and Vivien) in their human representations, see Carolyne Larrington, *King Arthur’s Enchantresses: Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition* (London: Taurus, 2006).
4. Robert de Boron, *Merlin: Roman du XIIIe Siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1980), p. 245.
5. Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette, ou, Le Roman de Lancelot*, ed. Charles Méla (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1992), p. 200; Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, trans. Burton Raffel (London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 75.
6. Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, *Lanzelet*, ed. Wolfgang Spiewok (Greifswald: Reineke-Verlag, 1997), pp. 8–10; Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, *Lanzelet*, trans. Thomas Kerth, with notes by Kenneth G. T. Webster and Roger Sherman Loomis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 29–30. The romance likely had an Anglo-Norman original predating even Chrétien’s *Lancelot*. See Kerth’s introduction, pp. 7–8; and Cooper, *Romance*, p. 468 n39.
7. *Lancelot: Roman en prose de XIII Siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha, 9 vols (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1978–83), 7.38; *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, 5 vols (New York: Garland, 1993–96), 2.11.
8. *Prose Merlin*, p. 274.
9. Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 156–59. This widespread reputation of the extreme beauty of fairies is also suggested by their use as benchmarks to gauge the beauty of human women. Thus, in Marie de France’s *Guigemar*, we have: “Dedenz unt la dame trove / Ki de biauté ressembloit fée” (703–704). The seneschal’s wife in the thirteenth-century *Durmart le Gallois* is described the same way: “plus estoit bele que fée” (231). Likewise, the narrator of the Anglo-Norman *Amadas et Ydoine* makes a similar claim for the heroine’s superlative beauty: “Ne fu ausi bele trouvee, / Se ne fu figure de fee” (4697–98). This sort of comparison, however, was popular long before the twelfth century. Judith, for example, in her eponymous Anglo-Saxon poem, is of “elf-shining” (*ælfscinu*) beauty, as is Abraham’s wife Sarah (*ælfscieno*) in *Genesis A*. Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. Alfred Ewert, intro. Glyn S. Burgess (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995), p. 21; *Durmart le Gallois*, ed. Joseph Gildea, 2 vols (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1965–66), 1.7; *Amadas et Ydoine: Roman du XIIIe Siècle*, ed. John Revell Reinhard (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1926), p. 185; *Beowulf and Judith*, ed. E. V. K. Dobbie (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 99; *Genesis A*, ed. A. N. Doane (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 167 and 211. See also, Kathryn S. Westoby, “A New Look at the Role of the *Fée* in Medieval French Arthurian Romance,” in *The Spirit of the Court: Selected Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society (Toronto 1983)*, ed. Glyn S. Burgess and Robert A. Taylor (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1985), pp. 373–85 (esp. pp. 375–76).
10. The *Gawain*-Poet begins his description of the Green Knight with “For of bak and of brest al were his bodi sturne, / Bot his wombe and his wast were worþily smale, / And alle his fetures fol3

ande in forme þat he hade, / ful clene” (143–46). This, then, is followed with a description of his clothing: “And alle his vesture uerayly watz clene verdure, / Boþe þe barres of his belt and oþer blyþe stones / þat were richely rayled in his aray clene / Aboutte hymself and his sadel, vpon silk werkez” (161–64). *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), pp. 212–17. The nature of the Green Knight, along with the equally ambiguous knight in *Amadas et Ydoine*, will be discussed later in this chapter.

11. *Sir Degarré*, in *Medieval English Romances: Part Two*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt and Nicholas Jacobs (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), p. 60 [57–88]; *Sir Orfeo*, ed. A. J. Bliss, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), pp. 14 and 34–35.
12. There are two notable exceptions to this. Robert de Boron, in his *Merlin*, describes how Morgan was very beautiful until she began to learn *enchantemens et charroies*, but as soon as she was *aspiree et de luxure et de dyable* she became ugly (p. 245). Likewise, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Morgan is depicted as old and haggard, and also as antagonistic to Guinevere, Arthur, and his court, though the connection between hideousness and malevolence is not explicitly made. The Green Knight also refers to Morgan as a “goddess” (2452), taken from the Vulgate *Merlin*, perhaps to emphasize her magical abilities. But just as Morgan’s presence does little to explain the nature and role of the Green Knight, the Green Knight’s use of “goddess” does little to explain the nature and role of Morgan in the poem.
13. The author of the thirteenth-century *South English Legendary* provides a detailed account of these neutral angels, as does Walter Map and, to a lesser extent, Gervase of Tilbury. The ultimate source of this explanation seems to be Augustine, who, citing 2 Peter 2.4, corroborates reports of incubi by arguing that they were originally cast from heaven on account of their association with Satan. For Augustine, however, these fallen angels are of course not “neutral,” but fully demonic. See *The South English Legendary II*, ed. Charlotte D’Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, EETS o.s. 236 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 408–410; Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 320–21; Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 730–31. Saint Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. Philip Levine, 7 vols (London: Heinemann, 1966), 4.547–61 (15.23). See also, Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, pp. 122–38.
14. See [chapter 3](#) for more on fairies and the “state of exception.” Also, see [chapter 2](#) for a discussion of the relationship between fairies in chronicles and romance.
15. Melusine is an exception to this model, though this may be accounted for due to her half fairy/half human nature (discussed in more detail later in this chapter).
16. Childbirth taboos are both trans-historically and cross-culturally ubiquitous, but as Mary Douglas has shown, they are nearly always related to concerns of cleanliness and pollution. Pressine’s taboo, however, has no obvious connection with matters of defilement, nor does pollution have any logical relation to the consequences of its violation. This issue will be discussed further in [chapter 4](#). See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), esp. pp. 66–67.
17. The one exception to this is her continued role in Arthur’s voyage to Avalon (discussed in more detail later in this chapter).
18. *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*, ed. R. L. Curtis, 3 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1963–85), 2.129–31; *The Romance of Tristan*, trans. R. L. Curtis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 137–38. Malory also includes the episode of the magic drinking horn in his *Morte Darthur*. See Sir Thomas Malory, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 3rd edn, rev. by P. J. C. Field, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 1.429–30 (VIII:34). See [chapter 4](#) for more on this episode.
19. See, for example, Malory’s episode of Accolon of Gaul (1.137–51; IV:6–14).
20. In addition to Morgan’s knowledge of herbs and roots, and her abilities to make marvelous healing plasters, her enhanced powers include her ability to travel around the world almost

instantaneously (much like Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), corral fish of the sea and tame dragons of the air. See Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, trans. Thomas L. Keller (London: Garland, 1987), pp. 74–75. Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, ed. Wolfgang Mohr (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1980), pp. 124–26. *Erex Saga*, the much-abbreviated Old Norse version from the mid-thirteenth century, makes no mention of Morgan. See *Erex Saga and ívens Saga: The Old Norse Versions of Chrétien de Troyes's Erec and Yvain*, trans. Foster W. Blaisdell and Marianne E. Kalinke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), pp. 3–33.

21. This text will be discussed further in [chapter 2](#).
22. Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, ed. L. Constans, 6 vols (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot, 1906–1912), 1.434. The two manuscripts are Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 783, and Montpellier, Bibl. Interuniversitaire. Sect. médecine, H. 251, the latter of which Jung dates to the second half of the thirteenth century. See Constans's introduction, pp. v–vii; and Marc-René Jung, *La Légende de Troie en France au Moyen Âge: Analyse des Versions Françaises et Bibliographie Raisonnée des Manuscrits* (Basel: Francke Verlag, 1996), pp. 116–22 and 180–85.
23. Variations include Orua, Orna, Oua, Orvuein, Orvan, Orvanz, Orains, Orainz, Ornains, Orueins, Oruain, and Oruain. See Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, 1.434.
24. *Huon de Bordeaux*, ed. Pierre Ruelle (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), p. 97. See later in this chapter for more on human/fairy miscegenation.
25. Even as early as the twelfth century Avalon was being used as something of a generic name for a fairy mistress's supernatural realm, presumably to cash in on its name recognition. Marie de France, for example, uses it in her *Lanval* (“Aualun,” 641) disassociated from Morgan (in *Sir Landevale* it is called “Amylyon,” 533, and in *Sir Launfal*, “Olyroun,” a “jolyf jle,” 1022–23), and, a step further, the English translator of Jean d'Arras uses it independently of both Morgan and the Arthurian tradition, as the name for Pressine's supernatural realm (discussed later in this chapter). Thomas Chestre, *Sir Launfal*, ed. A. J. Bliss (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960), p. 81. Bliss includes *Sir Landevale* in this edition as well, p. 128 [105–28].
26. John Bouchier, Lord Berners, *The Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux*, ed. S. L. Lee, EETS e.s. 60 (London: Trübner, 1882), p. 536 (144).
27. *Brun de la Montaigne: Roman d'Aventure*, ed. Paul Meyer (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot, 1875), p. 117.
28. *Mervine*, a close translation of the 1540 Paris edition of *L'histoire du preux Meurvin*, gets its first mention in the *Stationers's Registers* in February 1595–96, though the first surviving edition is from 1612 (STC 17844). See *Mervine: The most famous and renowned Historie, of that woorthie and illustrious knight Meruine, Sonne to that rare and excellent Mirror of princely Prowesse, Oger the Dane* (London: Blower and Sims, 1612). See also, Cooper, *Romance*, p. 469 n48. For more on the relationship between Morgan and Ogier see Paton, *Fairy Mythology*, pp. 74–80.
29. Bouchier, at different points in the text, presents Morgan as both human and fairy. See later in this chapter for more on such inconsistencies within romance text-worlds.
30. *Partonopeu de Blois*, ed. Joseph Gildea, 2 vols (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1967–68); *Partonope of Blois*, ed. A. Trampe Bødtker, EETS e.s. 109 (London: Oxford University Press, 1912).
31. This sort of Otherworldly travel is a common trope in romance, paralleled, for instance, in Marie de France's *Guigemar* and in the episode of Arthur, Urien, and Accalon in Book 4 of Malory's *Morte Darthur*.
32. Marie de France's *Guigemar*, for instance, along with *Guingamor* and *Graelent*, follow similar narrative patterns. See Marie de France, *Lais*, pp. 3–25; *French Arthurian Literature IV: Eleven Old French Narrative Lays*, ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2007), pp. 143–95 and 351–412.

33. Corinne Saunders makes this latter point in *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 156.
34. See Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 191. Parallels between *Partonope* and the Cupid and Psyche story have been drawn before, though these should not be overstated, as only basic elements in the plot remain similar. See, for example, T. H. Brown, "The Relationship between *Partonopeus of Blois* and the Cupid and Psyche Tradition," *Brigham Young University Studies* 5 (1964): 193–202.
35. There is a shorter, admittedly less sophisticated English version of *Partonope* in which Melior's powers are rationalized within the first 30 lines. However, since the existing fragment is cut short at only 308 lines, there is little to go on in terms of assessing how this change affects the story as a whole. Böttker includes this version in his edition (pp. 481–88).
36. Though only copies from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries survive, *Eger and Grime* is alluded to in the 1549 *Complaynt of Scotland*, and there is a record of a 1577 print, but the earliest allusion comes in 1497 when the Treasurer's Accounts of James IV of Scotland state that "twa fithelaris sang Gray Steil" to the King. *Compota Thesauriorum Regum Scotorum: Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*, ed. Thomas Dickson, 12 vols (Edinburgh: H. M. General Register House, 1877–1916), 1.330. See Caldwell's Introduction in *Eger and Grime*, ed. James Ralston Caldwell (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1933), pp. 6–13.
37. In the extended print version Eger eventually does marry Loospaine (here Liliás), but only after both Winglayne and Grime, their respective former spouses, pass away. As to why the later print version would tack on such an ending, much of which is told in retrospective summary, remains very much open to speculation. It may have something to do, however, with the trend in later romance to move away from characteristically "happy" endings. For a discussion of "unhappy endings" see Cooper, *Romance*, pp. 361–408.
38. The specific narrative and imaginative reasons for Loospaine's ontological irresolvability will be discussed further in [chapter 3](#).
39. Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. Ewert, pp. 3–25; *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 43–55.
40. *A Royal Historie of the Excellent Knight Generides*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (Hertford: Stephen Austin, 1865), pp. 19–20.
41. Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, pp. 169–71.
42. Fictional facts, quite simply, represent that which is true or actual within the world of a fictional text. These facts rely upon an "intraworld criteria of authenticity," as Ronen says, and therefore reflect the autonomy of fictional worlds. Ronen, *Possible Worlds*, p. 177.
43. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*, p. 108.
44. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 49–50; also, Lubomír Doležel, "Fictional Worlds: Density, Gaps, and Inference," *Style* 29 (1995): 201–14.
45. Ryan argues, based on the principles of minimal departure, that the process of filling these gaps is not only inherently intertextual, but also tends to be intra-generic. That is, since any given text-world is a priori populated by that which is characteristic of what may be called a "generic landscape," readers will tend to fill gaps based on generic norms. See Ryan, *Possible Worlds*, pp. 54–57.
46. Iser further notes that an overdetermined text causes the reader to engage in a process of constructing the world of a fictional text because "it is he who has to structure the meaning potential arising out of the multifarious connections between the semantic levels of the text." Iser, *Act of Reading*, p. 49. A term adopted from dream psychology, "overdetermination" was first used in reference to fictional texts by Simon Lesser. See *Fiction and the Unconscious* (London: Peter Owen, 1960), esp. pp. 113–20 and 200–204.

47. As mentioned previously, Morgan, in Bouchier's *Huon of Burdeux*, is depicted (much like the heroines in *Guigemar* and *Generides*) with contradictory fictional facts. She is presented as fully fairy, one of the "notable ladies of the fayrey" (156, p. 601), along with Oberon's mother, but she is also Arthur's sister (172, p. 684). This inconsistency, however, plays no large part in the construction of *Huon's* text-world, nor does it appear to be part of any overarching authorial strategy. Such a contradiction, rather, seems to be an aberrant manifestation of Bouchier lifting his Arthurian characters from their native tradition (in which a humanized Morgan of familial relation to Arthur was, especially in later texts, the norm) and emphasizing their supernatural qualities in order to fit his narrative needs.
48. Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain*, ed. Wendelin Forester, intro. and notes T. B. W. Reid (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1942).
49. See, for instance, A. C. L. Brown, *Iwain: Study in the Origins of Arthurian Romance* (New York: Haskell House, 1903), esp. pp. 27–55; Laura A. Hibbard, *Mediaeval Romance in England: A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1963), pp. 314–15.
50. The advantages (and disadvantages) of a knight being favored by a fairy mistress will be discussed in [chapter 4](#).
51. *Li Romans de Claris et Laris*, ed. Johann Alton (Tübingen: Litterarischen Verein, 1864).
52. The story of Melusine was given both a verse and prose treatment in French, and, nearly a century later, around 1500, both verse and prose versions were translated into English. See *Melusine*, ed. A. K. Donald, EETS e.s. 68 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895); Jean d'Arras, *Méluſine: Roman de XIV Siècle*, ed. Louis Stouff (1932; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1974); *The Romans of Partenay, or of Lusignan*, ed. W. W. Skeat, EETS o.s. 22 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1899); Couldrette, *A Bilingual Edition of Couldrette's Méluſine or Le Roman de Parthenay*, ed. Matthew W. Morris (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2003).
53. See [chapter 4](#) for more on this taboo.
54. For descriptions of the "birthmarks" of each of Melusine's children see *Melusine*, 19, pp. 64–65 and 102–05. For a more sociopolitical approach to Melusine and her children see Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "Maternity and Monstrosity: Reproductive Biology in the *Roman de Méluſine*," in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 100–124. Melusine and her children will be discussed further in [chapter 4](#).
55. Horrible's purely malevolent nature is exceptionally rare in depictions of fairies or quasi-fairies in romance. The motif of a child who bites or kills his wet nurses is more reminiscent of demon/human offspring, such as Gowther in *Sir Gowther* or Robert in *Robert the Devil*, than of any human/fairy offspring. See *Sir Gowther* in *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. M. Mills (London: Dent, 1973), pp. 148–68; *Robert le Diable: Roman d'Aventures*, ed. E. Löseth (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot, 1903). *Robert the Devil* was very popular throughout the later Middle Ages, especially in print (both in English and French), from the late fifteenth century onward. For an edition of Wynkyn de Worde's printing see *The Lyfe of Robert the Deuyll in Early English Prose Romances*, ed. William John Thoms, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Nattali and Bond, 1858), 1.3–56. Merlin is another figure who retains much of his incubus father's supernatural abilities, though his benevolence is based on God's providence and the piety of his mother. See [chapter 4](#) for more on incubi fathers.
56. Guinglain's human inheritance, however, is highly significant, as being the son of Gawain, he is endowed with inherently heroic qualities. It may be that the author chose to give him a fairy mother to avoid the potential complications of bringing different human lineages into contact, though the later English rendition *Lybeaus Desconus* makes no mention of the Fair Unknown having a fairy mother. See *Le Bel Inconnu*, ed. Karen Fresco, trans. Colleen P. Donagher

- (London: Garland, 1992), pp. 310–11; *Lybeaus Desconus*, ed. M. Mills, EETS o.s. 261 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). Also, Mervine's inheritance from his human father Ogier and fairy mother Morgan, in *Mervine Son of Ogier*, operates in the same way as it does for Guinglain.
57. Robert Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075–1225* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 686–92. See also, C. S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. pp. 61–66; Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 9–14.
 58. Ralph of Coggeshall, in the early thirteenth century, records the story of an aquatic man caught off the shores of Suffolk. At roughly the same time Gervase of Tilbury recounts the story of the aerial mariners, and in the late fourteenth century Thomas Walsingham gives the account of the mysterious black knights. See Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. Joseph Stevenson, Rolls Series 66 (London, 1875), pp. 117–18; Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 80–81; Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. H. T. Riley, Rolls Series 28, 2 vols (London, 1863–64), 1.295.
 59. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Trevor R. Griffiths (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 170 (3.2.382 and 387). Melusine makes a similar claim, as does the Oberon of *Huon of Burdeaux*. When Huon and his companions first encounter Oberon they take him to be a devil, but Oberon is quick to correct them, claiming he is neither “deuyll nor yll creature” (24, p. 69), just as Melusine has to reassure Raymondin that her powers are not of the “dyuels werk,” but rather that she is “of god” and believes as a good Catholic ought to believe (6, p. 31). These and other protestations will be discussed further in [chapter 4](#).
 60. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 98–99.
 61. Geraldus Cambrensis, *Itinerarium Kambriæ et Descriptio Kambriæ*, ed. James F. Dimock, Rolls Series 21, 8 vols (London, 1868), 6.93–94; Gerald of Wales, *The Journey through Wales and the Description of Wales*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1978), pp. 151–52.
 62. Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, pp. 261–62. Demons and the devil were often associated with red in the Middle Ages. See Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 69. For a further discussion of this account see my article, “Abduction, Surgery, Madness: An Account of a Little Red Man in Thomas Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora*,” *Medium Ævum* 77 (2008): 10–29. The account will also be discussed in [chapter 3](#).
 63. Like red, green was another common color associated with devils or demons, such as Chaucer's devil in the *Friar's Tale*. See Russell, *Lucifer*, p. 69.
 64. See, for example, Roger Sherman Loomis, “More Celtic Elements in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 42 (1943): 149–84; Clinton Machann, “A Structural Study of the English Gawain Romances,” *Neophilologus* 66 (1982): 629–37; Jeffrey F. Huntsman, “The Celtic Heritage of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” in *Approaches to Teaching Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Miriam Youngerman Miller and Jane Chance (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1986), pp. 177–81. A related reading is that the Green Knight is, as John Speirs puts it, the “recrudescence in poetry” of English fertility myths. See John Spiers, *Medieval English Poetry: The Non-Chaucerian Tradition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 219 [215–51].
 65. By the later Middle Ages “fantoum and fayry^{3e}” became somewhat of a stock phrase synonymous with “illusion,” presumably due to widespread accounts and literary treatments of fairies altering perceptions and/or creating illusions.
 66. The scene of the mysterious knight's arrival into Cambyuskan's court in the *Squire's Tale* picks up on many of these same themes of illusion and enchantment. This scene, coupled with the allusion to Gawain “comen ayeyn out of fairye” (5.96) has been used to suggest parallels between the *Squire's Tale* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. It is particularly interesting that there is

no extant romance of Gawain coming out of (or going into) the fairy realm. It may be that in the romance the *Gawain-Poet* heard in town (31–2), or in the book of romance he cites at the end (2521), Gawain did make a journey into the fairy realm. This would suggest not only a common source for Chaucer and the *Gawain-Poet*, but also that the *Gawain-Poet*'s source was a fairy romance, and that the Green Knight's original was a fairy knight. This, of course, is merely speculation, but it is plausible, since both romances share similar scenes and both also suggest a well-known but now lost source. See Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 169–72.

67. The Green Knight's tests, along with other such tests, will be discussed further in [chapter 3](#).
68. See *Amadas and Ydoine*, trans. by Ross G. Arthur (London: Garland, 1993), p. 102.
69. White fairy horses are a common motif in romance, appearing in the Old French *Lais Tydorel* (81–84) and *Espine* (310–11, 414–22), as well as in *Sir Orfeo* (145). Bells on the bridle are also common, as on the dapple-grey horse of the fairy mistress in *Thomas of Erceldoune* (63–64). See *Lays*, pp. 216–39 and 326–47; *Sir Orfeo*, pp. 14–15; *Thomas of Erceldoune*, pp. 4–5.
70. *Der Mittelenglische Versroman über Richard Löwenherz*, ed. Karl Brunner (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1913), p. 83.
71. Gerald of Wales relates a similar story, but places it one generation back, making the supernatural woman the bride of Henry II's father (see [chapter 4](#)).

2 Avalon: Simulacra and Fictional Facts

1. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britannie I: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1984), p. 132; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1966), p. 261. Thorpe's translation glosses over the paradox of Arthur's mortal wounds (*letaliter uulneratus*) being healed (*sananda*) in Avalon (see later in this chapter).
2. Julia Crick lists 217 MSS in her survey. See *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth III: A Summary Catalogue of the Manuscripts* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988). See also, Julia Crick, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth IV: Dissemination and Reception in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991).
3. See D. H. Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150–1220* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. pp. 35–54.
4. See Watkins, *Supernatural*, pp. 5–12.
5. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia*, p. 74.
6. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia*, p. 74; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History*, p. 150.
7. See Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 37–53.
8. Here I am following Deleuze, who adopts the Platonic distinction between two types of images (*idoles*), one of which is copies (*icôns*), the other simulacra (*phantasms*). The simulacrum moves beyond the copy in that it is not a "simple imitation," but instead "the act by which the very idea of a model . . . is challenged . . . The simulacrum is the instance which includes the difference within itself . . . so that one can no longer point to the existence of an original and a copy." Thus, for Deleuze, the simulacrum is not the "hyperreal," the "liquidation of all referentials," as Jean Baudrillard develops it later, but rather it is a type of referential that is inexorably split from, and therefore bears no direct correspondence to, its referent. This concept of the simulacrum will be further developed later in this chapter. See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 1994), pp. 66–69 and 127; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and*

Simulations, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 1–2 [1–13].

9. Herman of Laon, *De Miraculis S. Mariae Laudunensis de Gestis*, Patrologiæ Latina 156 (1853), pp. 994–95 and 1003; See J. S. P. Tatlock, “The English Journey of the Laon Canons,” *Speculum* 8 (1933): 454–55 [454–65]; J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), pp. 204–205.
10. This ambiguity, moreover, is maintained in a number of references to the “Breton Hope” from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, and to further complicate matters it is also often unclear in some sources as to whether “Britons” or “Bretons” are in reference to ancient Britons or Bretons or to their contemporary medieval descendants. All sources considered, however, even though later texts often refer to the Bretons specifically (discussed more later), the ambiguity of some later references, often with less contextual evidence to draw from, still remains. See Tatlock, *Legendary History*, p. 204; Roger Sherman Loomis, “The Legend of Arthur’s Survival,” in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 64–65 [64–71].
11. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1.26–27; also, E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1927; repr. Cambridge, UK: Speculum Historiale, 1964), p. 249.
12. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, 1.520–21.
13. Without any specific geographical references there is no way of knowing for sure as to whether William is here referring to the Bretons or the British, but his provenance in Malmesbury may suggest an association with the Bretons, as does Herman of Laon’s account just twelve years prior.
14. Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 580–81.
15. Ailred of Rievaulx, *Opera Omnia*, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot, 3 vols (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971), 1.90.
16. Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, c. 550–1307* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), p. 213.
17. F. M. Powicke, “Introduction,” in *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx by Walter Daniel*, ed. and trans. F. M. Powicke (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1950), pp. 87–88 [9–89].
18. Wace, *Roman de Brut*, ed. and trans. Judith Weiss (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), pp. 332–34.
19. As with Herman of Laon and William of Malmesbury, Gervase’s use of “*Britonum*” is ambiguous. Earlier in his *Otia Imperialia* he distinguishes between *Britannia maior* (Great Britain) and *minoris Britannie* (Brittany). Such distinctions, though, are of little help here, and only in the context of other accounts may *Britonum* be supposed to refer to the Bretons. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 398–99 and 428–29; Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle*, ed. W. A. Wright, Rolls Series 86, 2 vols (London, 1887), 1.324.
20. Pierre de Langtoft, *The Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft*, ed. and trans. T. Wright, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1866), 1.224–25; Robert Manning of Brunne, *The Story of England*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, 2 vols (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), 2.496; *The Brut or The Chronicles of England*, ed. Friedrich W. D. Brie, EETS o.s. 131, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906), 1.90. The exact date of the English prose *Brut* remains uncertain. Matheson dates it to 1380–1400, while Taylor argues for the “middle years of the fourteenth century.” See Lister M. Matheson, *The Prose Brut: The Development of a Middle English*

- Chronicle* (Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998), pp. 47–48; John Taylor, *English Historical Literature in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 127.
21. John Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, EETS e.s. 121–24, 4 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 3.909–10.
 22. E. K. Chambers follows the evidence for these affiliations. See Chambers, *Arthur*, pp. 20–52. For more recent discussions see Wright, *Historia Regum Britannie*, pp. x [i–xxi]; W. R. J. Barron, “Dynastic Chronicles,” in *The Arthur of the English*, ed. W. R. J. Barron (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 12 n5 [11–46].
 23. Neil Wright argues that Geoffrey originally and primarily dedicated his *Historia* to Robert of Gloucester. See Wright, *Historia Regum Britannie*, pp. xii–xv. See also, John Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000), p. 20; Green, *Beginnings*, pp. 169–77.
 24. Historians have long argued for the continuation of this project through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. See, for example, Tatlock, *Legendary History*, pp. 178–229.
 25. See Gillingham, *English*, pp. 32–39; Paul Dalton, “The Topical Concerns of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britannie*: History, Prophecy, Peacemaking, and English Identity in the Twelfth Century,” *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005): 692–93 [688–712].
 26. The *Description of England*’s original attribution to Geoffrey Gaimar has been dismissed on linguistic grounds. Used to form part of the epilogue to Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis* (or as a prologue to Gaimar’s work in one manuscript), it is based in part on Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum* (c.1129), though it does betray the influence of Geoffrey’s *Historia*. Geoffrey Gaimar, *Lestorie des Engles*, ed. and trans. Thomas Duffs Hardy and Charles Trice Martin, Rolls Series 91, 2 vols (London, 1888–89), 1.287; 2.213–14. See also, Lesley Johnson, “The Anglo-Norman *Description of England*: An Introduction,” in *Anglo-Norman Anniversary Essays*, ed. Ian Short, Anglo-Norman Text Society 2 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1993), pp. 11–30; Alexander Bell, “The Anglo-Norman *Description of England*: An Edition,” in *Anglo-Norman Anniversary Essays*, pp. 31–45.
 27. Twelfth-century scholars derived the distinction between *historia*, the literally true record of events (*gestae res*, *res factae*), and *fabula*, the things of fiction (*res fictae*), from ancient authorities such as Cicero, Macrobius, and Isidore of Seville. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott follow these connections in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100–1375: The Commentary Tradition*, ed. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott with David Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 113–26.
 28. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 558–59.
 29. William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh and M. J. Kennedy (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1988), pp. 28–29.
 30. William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, pp. 34–35.
 31. William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, pp. 34–37.
 32. William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, pp. 118–21.
 33. William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, pp. 120–21.
 34. William was not the only historian critical of Geoffrey’s *Historia*. Gerald of Wales tells of a monk named Meilyr who was able to pick out lying passages in books and uncover sinful monks because he had the gift of seeing demons as they flocked toward sin and deceit. Sometimes, though, the demons would get too bothersome, so other monks would place a copy of Saint John’s Gospel on his lap to make the demons scatter. Once, “just to see what would happen,” the monks removed the Gospel and put Geoffrey’s *Historia* on Meilyr’s lap (Gerald calls it the *Historia Britonum a Galfrido Arthuro tractata*). The demons then alighted all over his body and

- on the book too, and “stayed there longer than usual and were especially demanding.” See Geraldus Cambrensis, *Itinerarium Kambriæ*, 6.57–59.
35. For a discussion on the importance of eyewitness testimony and the rise of empirical approaches to historical writing, see Peter Damian-Grint, *The New Historians of the Twelfth Century Renaissance: Inventing Vernacular Authority* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), pp. 68–72. See also, Elisabeth van Houts, “Genre Aspects of the Use of Oral Information in Medieval Historiography,” in *Gattungen mittelalterlicher Schriftlichkeit*, ed. Barbara Frank, Thomas Haye, and Doris Tophinke (Tübingen: Narr, 1997), pp. 297–311.
 36. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 728–29.
 37. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 428–29.
 38. As Maurice Blanchot says: “l’image doit cesser d’être seconde par rapport à un prétendu premier objet et doit revendiquer une certaine primauté, de même que l’original, puis l’origine vont perdre leurs privilèges de puissances initiales.” See “Le rire des dieux,” *Nouvelle Revue Française* 13 (1965): 99 [91–105].
 39. Michel Foucault, “The Prose of Actaeon,” in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984, Volume II*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 127 [123–35].
 40. William refers to “Glastinbiry” as the English name for the “insulam pomorum,” which the British call “Avallonie,” since “aualla enim britonice, poma interpretatur latine.” The Avalon/Glastonbury connection will be discussed later. See *The Early History of Glastonbury: An Edition, Translation and Study of William of Malmesbury’s De Antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesie*, ed. and trans. John Scott (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), pp. 52–53.
 41. In this description Gerald, like William of Malmesbury, associates Avalon with Glastonbury. See Geraldus Cambrensis, *De Principis Instructione*, ed. James F. Dimock, Rolls Series 21, 8 vols (London, 1868), 8.128.
 42. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini*, ed. and trans. Basil Clarke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), pp. 100–103.
 43. Even if the names were cognate, such associations could never be more than hypothetical, and in the end, would do little in terms of contributing to our understanding of Morgan’s appearance in the *Vita Merlini*. See Rachel Bromwich’s note on Morgan le Fay in *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*, ed. and trans. Rachel Bromwich, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978), pp. 461–63; *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language*, ed. M. E. Byrne, 4 vols (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1913–76), 3.173 [s.v. Morrigan].
 44. Etienne de Rouen, “Epistola Arturi Regis,” pp. 248–49; Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, ed. and trans. Carleton W. Carroll (New York: Garland, 1987).
 45. Green, *Beginnings*, p. 4.
 46. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britannie*, p. 1.
 47. William of Newburgh, *History*, pp. 34–35.
 48. Green argues that the words *musamque jocosam* allude to Ovid’s *Musa iocosa* (playful muse), who was invoked in the defense of the fictionality of his own work: “magna pars mendax operum est et ficta meorum / plus sibi sermisit compositore suo” [the greater part of my work is a pretense and fictitious, and has allowed itself more license than its author]. *Tristia* 2.355. Quoted from Green, *Beginnings*, p. 33.
 49. Wace was not the first to translate Geoffrey of Monmouth into French. Geoffrey Gaimar produced a version between 1147 and 1151, which was to form the first part of a trilogy making up the whole history of the nation. Gaimar’s *Brut* was to be followed by an *Estorie des Engleis* and the series was to end with an account of the reign of Henry I. The trilogy as a whole has not survived, but we know of its content from the linking passage in the *Estorie des Engleis*. In the

surviving manuscripts Gaimar's *Brut* has been replaced by Wace's, which suggests something of the reputation of his *Brut*.

50. Wace bases his omission of Merlin's prophecies on the claim that he could not interpret them (7538–42).
51. This seems to have been a question actually considered, at least by some people. According to Julian del Castillo, it was rumored that Philip II swore, apparently at the time of his marriage to Mary Tudor, that he would resign the kingdom if Arthur should return. Of course, Philip may not even have known about the rumor, let alone sworn such an oath, and if he had, it seems unlikely that he would have been too concerned about losing his crown. See Charles Bowie Millican, *Spenser and the Round Table* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 36.
52. Geoffrey accounts for two such periods of peace, one of twelve years, the other nine. See Ad Putter, "Finding Time for Romance," *Medium Ævum* 63 (1994): 1–16.
53. See Green, *Beginnings*, p. 178 [176–81].
54. It should be noted, too, that Merlin's prophecies disrupt the strict chronological structure of Geoffrey's *Historia*, though considered independently they do follow an apparent sequential order. The *Prophecies* did circulate separately as a *libellus*, but when they were included within the *Historia* they were placed immediately after the most significant event at that point in the narrative—the arrival of the Saxons. As Brynley Roberts has noted, "History stands still for a moment while we seek its significance." See "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Welsh Historical Tradition," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 20 (1976): 39 [29–40].
55. Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 297.
56. Wace, *The Roman de Rou*, ed. Anthony J. Holden and trans. Glyn S. Burgess (Jersey: Société Jersiaise, 2002), pp. 236–37.
57. F. H. M. Le Saux argues that Wace uses this passage to highlight the degeneracy of Brocéliande. See *A Companion to Wace* (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2005), pp. 188–89.
58. Laʒamon, *Brut or Hystoria Brutonum*, ed. and trans. W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (New York: Longman, 1995), pp. 2–3.
59. See Cyril Edwards, "Laʒamon's Elves," in *Laʒamon: Contexts, Language, and Interpretation*, ed. Rosamund Allen, Lucy Perry, and Jane Annette Roberts (London: King's College Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 2002), pp. 93–94 [79–96].
60. See Paton, *Fairy Mythology*, pp. 26–27; J. D. Bruce, "Some Proper Names in Layamon's *Brut* not Represented in Wace or Geoffrey of Monmouth," *Modern Language Notes* 26 (1911): 65–69.
61. See W. R. J. Barron, "The Idiom and the Audience of Laʒamon's *Brut*," in *Laʒamon: Contexts, Language, and Interpretation*, pp. 157–84.
62. In the concluding lines the author (perhaps anticipating such admonishments) asks to be not too heavily criticized for his treatment of the *Historia* and attempts to keep his detractors at bay by saying "Nil ego pro uictis, nil doctis scribo magistris, / Sed rudibus rude carmen ego" (483–84) [I write nothing for advanced or educated masters, but with a harsh throat I sing a simple song for the unlearned]. *Gesta Regum Britannie*, ed. and trans. Neil Wright (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1991), pp. 284–85.
63. Geraldus Cambrensis, *De Principis Instructione*, 8.128.
64. Richard may have been the first English king to associate himself with Arthur. According to Roger of Howden's *Gesta Regis Ricardi*, Richard possessed the sword that the "Brittones" called Caliburn, the sword of Arthur, *rex Britonum*. But by the time Roger of Howden edited this account for his *Chronica*, Arthur had become *rex Angliæ*. Richard also carried Excalibur with him when he rode out from Vézelay at the start of his crusade, but as Gillingham notes, he was capable of weighing the value of a legendary sword against more tangible goods, for when he

- dealt with King Tancred of Sicily, he traded Excalibur for four transport ships and fifteen galleys. See *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis: The Chronicle of the Reigns of Henry II and Richard I*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series 49, 2 vols (London, 1867), 2.159; Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series 51, 4 vols (London, 1868–71), 3.97; John Gillingham, *Richard Coeur de Lion: Kingship, Chivalry and War in the Twelfth Century* (London: Hambledon, 1994), p. 102. See text that follows for more on Arthur's association with the English kings. See also, Gillingham, *English*, p. 23; W. A. Nitze, "The Exhumation of King Arthur at Glastonbury," *Speculum* 9 (1934): 355–61.
65. R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales, 1063–1415* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 27–28.
 66. Brynley F. Roberts, "Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Brut Y Brenhinedd*," in *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, ed. Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), p. 113 [97–116].
 67. *Brut Y Tywysogyon*, as cited by Davies, *Conquest*, pp. 52–53. See also, Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 44–45.
 68. Davies, *Conquest*, p. 54.
 69. Nitze, "Exhumation of King Arthur," pp. 360–61.
 70. As Parsons notes, Llewelyn's crown may have been advertised as Arthur's, but that it was in fact Llewelyn's is proved by Edward's jewel account showing that it had been re-gilded before Edward presented it at Westminster. See John Carmi Parsons, "The Second Exhumation of King Arthur's Remains at Glastonbury, 19 April 1278," in *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition*, ed. James P. Carley (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2001), p. 83 n8 [79–83].
 71. *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series 76, 2 vols (London, 1882–83), 1.91. English translation quoted from R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 40 n32.
 72. Additionally, in July of the year before Edward returned to London, he held a Round Table in Nevyn, Carnarvonshire, to celebrate his conquest of Wales, again using political pageantry to align the English monarchy with the Arthurian past. See Roger Sherman Loomis, "Edward I, Arthurian Enthusiast," *Speculum* 28 (1953): 114–27.
 73. *La Mort le Roi Artu: Roman du XIIIe Siècle*, ed. Jean Frappier (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1936), p. 227.
 74. For a list of the major texts dealing with Arthur's burial at Glastonbury see Richard Barber, "Was Mordred Buried at Glastonbury? Arthurian Tradition at Glastonbury in the Middle Ages," in *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition*, pp. 145–59.
 75. Over 180 manuscripts of the English *Brut* survive, along with 50 of its source, an Anglo-Norman redaction of Wace's *Brut*. See Matheson, *Prose Brut*, pp. xvi–xxxii and 6–8.
 76. *Brut*, 1.90.
 77. This notion of repetition, of copies produced from copies, is central to Deleuze's conception of simulacra. In contrast to *icônes*, simulacra "externalize resemblance and live on difference instead. If they produce an external effect of resemblance, this takes the form of an illusion." In other words, as Deleuze continues, in the movement of "degraded likeness from copy to copy, we reach a point at which everything changes nature, at which copies themselves flip over into simulacra and at which, finally, resemblance . . . gives way to repetition." Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 127–28.

78. *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, ed. Churchill Babington and Joseph Rawson Lumby, Rolls Series 41, 9 vols (London, 1865–86), 5.339. Earlier in his translation Trevisa refers to an account by William of Malmesbury as “a magel tale wiþ oute evidence” (5.337). It is worth noting too, as Christopher Baswell points out, that there may have been some political impetus behind Trevisa’s rejection of the story of Arthur’s return. Trevisa’s patron, Thomas Berkeley, held lands in Gloucestershire near the Welsh borderlands, as well as in Cornwall, and it is unlikely that the notion of Arthur’s return to aid the Bretons in reconquering the land would have sat comfortably with readers such as Berkeley. See Christopher Baswell, “Troy, Arthur, and the Languages of ‘Brutis Albeyoun,’ ” in *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, ed. Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), p. 184 [170–98].
79. Alongside the prose *Brut*, for example, the *Short English Metrical Chronicle* (c.1330) makes Arthur’s death at Glastonbury explicit: “At Glastingbiri he was ded / & ybirid for so he bed” (1111–12). See *An Anonymous Short Metrical Chronicle*, ed. Ewald Zettl, EETS o.s. 196 (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 71.
80. The alliterative *Morte Arthure* is perhaps the most exact in making the Glastonbury connection, since Arthur says he will go to Glastonbury—not Avalon—to have his wounds treated: “Graith us to Glashenbury; us gaines none other; / There we may rest us with roo and ransack our woundes” (4303–304). It is there that Arthur “passes his spirit,” and is eventually brought “to the erthe” (4326–30). *King Arthur’s Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1986), p. 237 [236–38].
81. William Caxton, “Prologue to *King Arthur*,” in *Caxton’s Own Prose*, ed. N. F. Blake (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973), pp. 107–108 [106–110].
82. The structural repetition of the first two paragraphs quoted here (“Thus of Arthur I fynde no more wrytten in bokis that bene auctorysed, nothir more of the verry sertaynté of hys dethe harde I never rede, but . . .” and “Now more of the deth of kynge Arthur coude I never fynde, but . . .”) appears to be a technique used by Malory to imply different sources for information contained in each: the first being derived from “auctorysed” books, the second from the tale of Sir Bedwere.
83. This is not the first time Malory creates an intra-world textual record for the events that take place within the fiction of his romance. At the end of the tale of the Sankgreal, Malory relates how Arthur “made grete clerkes to com before hym, for cause they shulde cronycle of the hyghe adventures of the good knyghtes.” Lancelot and Bors then relate all they had seen, and “all thys was made in grete bookes and put up in almeryes at Salysbury” (2.1036; XVII:23). In Malory’s source text, the *Queste del saint Graal*, Arthur orders that Bors’ eyewitness accounts be set down in Latin by clerics (*clers*) employed by the court to chronicle the adventures of the knights. These texts, the author of the *Queste* relates, were kept in the Library of Salisbury and were later used by Walter Map to write his book of the *Seint Graal* for Henry II, who then had them translated into French, these translations being, it is implied, the *Queste* itself (Map, of course, died before the *Queste* was composed and could not have been its actual author). Such constructions of textual sources *internal* to the texts themselves seem fitting for Arthurian romances that adopt some characteristics of their source chronicles, but similar constructions also appear in other less “historic” romances—namely the Old French *Lais*. *Tyolet*, for example, describes how knights would return to court from “beles aventures” and recount their experiences, the best being, like *Tyolet* itself, written down by clerics in Latin, and later, much like as in the *Queste*, “De latin en romanz trovees” (34). Connections between the textual recording of intra-world events in the *lais* and the aforementioned romances may have to do with a certain anxiety of authenticity, as those events consistently considered the most historically tenuous—events including the super-natural—are a hallmark not only of the *lais*, but also of the tale of the Sankgreal, and of Arthur’s passing. See *La Queste del Saint Graal: Roman du XIIIe Siècle*, ed. Albert Pauphilet (Paris:

- Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1923), pp. 279–80; *Lancelot-Grail*, 4.87; *Lays*, pp. 108–39.
84. Alan Fletcher has argued that this phrase was intended to imply Arthur's death, underpinning Malory's conception of the tragedy of the Arthurian court. But even in this, Fletcher still insists on the complexity of Malory's treatment. This tension between whether Arthur is alive or dead culminates in the final Latin epitaph, which John Withrington has called an "essential paradox." See Alan J. Fletcher, "King Arthur's Passing in the *Morte D'Arthur*," *English Language Notes* 31 (1994): 19–24; John Withrington, "The Arthurian Epitaph in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*," in *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition*, pp. 211–48.
 85. In contrast to Malory, the author of the *Mort Artu* does not seem concerned with the historicity of Arthur's passing. He does not reference any authoritative sources, nor does he attempt to validate it in any way. He also makes Arthur's death unambiguous. When Griflet arrives at the Black Chapel he asks the hermit: "Sire, est il voirs que ci gist li rois Artus?" to which the hermit responds, "Oil, biax amis, il I gist voirement; ci l'aportèrent ne sai quex dames." *Mort Artu*, p. 227.
 86. See P. J. C. Field, *Romance and Chronicle: A Study of Malory's Prose Style* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1971); E. D. Kennedy, "Sir Thomas Malory's (French) Romance and (English) Chronicle," in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P. J. C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2004), pp. 223–34; Andrew King, *The Faerie Queene and Middle English Romance: The Matter of Just Memory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), esp. pp. 117–25.

3 Beyond Orthodoxy: Tests and Quests

1. See [chapter 1](#) for a discussion of the "neutral angels" theory and the conceptual positioning of fairies between the orthodox and the heterodox.
2. Chaucer uses a similar expression, "of chivalrie the flour" (1.982), to denote Theseus's company in the *Knight's Tale*.
3. By way of example, and as a testament to their widespread occurrence, all of these situations occur in various guises in Malory's *Morte Darthur*. For the multiplication of opponents, Gawain, in Book 5, along with a small band of "good knyghtes," defeats 10,000 of Emperor Lucius's men (1.206–11; V:6). For the motif of two equal knights facing each other through mistaken identities, the deadly battle in Book 2 between Balyn and Balan is an especially potent example (1.89–90; II:18). And in Book 5 Arthur defeats, after a perilous fight, the giant of "Seynte Mychaels Mounte" (1.202–204; V:5). Magic, too, is used against Arthur in Book 4 when Morgan le Fay steals Excalibur (which always draws blood while its scabbard always protects) and gives it to Accalon of Gaul. Arthur is wounded to such an extent that he "dred hym sore to be dede," but in the end regains his sword and accordingly wins the battle (1.142–45; IV:9). As for a quest for mystical objects, the "Tale of the Sankgreal" takes up five books in the *Morte* and leaves all of Arthur's best knights, save Galahad, defeated (2.853–1037; XIII–XVII).
4. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 17–18.
5. Agamben follows Carl Schmitt's definition (*Politische Theologie*, 1922) of the sovereign as "he who decides on the state of exception." See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 1; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 11.
6. As Agamben, quoting Schmitt, says: "The sovereign, who can decide on the state of exception, guarantees its anchorage to the juridical order. But precisely because the decision here concerns the very annulment of the norm, that is, because the state of exception represents the inclusion and capture of a space that is neither outside nor inside . . . 'the sovereign stands outside of the normally valid juridical order, and yet belongs to it, for it is he who is responsible for deciding

whether the constitution can be suspended *in toto*.’ ” Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 35; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 15.

7. As Walter Ullmann argues, the sovereign in the later Middle Ages was envisaged as the supreme authority, *lex animata*, legality and justice personified. In England, at least since *Magna Carta*, the sovereign was, by law, held within the law, but the state of exception is precisely that zone of indistinction in which the law, in this respect, ceases to remain in force. See Walter Ullmann, “The Development of the Medieval Idea of Sovereignty,” *English Historical Review* 64 (1949): 3 [1–33]. For a study of the place of *Magna Carta* in thirteenth-century English government and its attempted use to prevent abuse of monarchical power, see J. C. Hunt, *Magna Carta*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. pp. 75–123.
8. Bliss’s edition reproduces all three manuscript versions (the Auchinleck MS, Harley 3810 and Ashmole 61). I will cite from the Auchinleck version throughout.
9. Foucault identifies biopolitics as a specifically modern phenomenon, developing at the “threshold of modernity” when natural life begins to be included in the mechanisms of state power. As he says in *The History of Sexuality*: “For millennia man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question.” Agamben, however, challenges this temporal distinction: “the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original—if concealed—nucleus of sovereign power In this sense, biopolitics is at least as old as the sovereign exception.” Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1979), p. 143; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 6.
10. The sovereign sphere, characterized by the arbitrary decisions of the sovereign, is “the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life—that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed—is the life that has been captured in this sphere.” Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 83.
11. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 28–29.
12. The production of Heurodis as a biopolitical body will be discussed later.
13. As Jean-Luc Nancy says, “Abandonment . . . is a compulsion to appear absolutely under the law, under the law as such and in its totality. In the same way—it is the same thing—to be *banished* amounts not to coming under a provision of the law but rather to coming under the entirety of the law.” Jean-Luc Nancy, “Abandoned Being,” in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 44 [36–47].
14. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 29. Agamben takes the term “ban” from Jean-Luc Nancy, who says that “the origin of ‘abandonment’ is a putting at *bandon*. *Bandon* (*bandum*, *band*, *bannen*) is an order, a prescription, a decree, a permission, and the power that holds those freely at its disposal. To abandon is to remit, entrust, or turn over to such a sovereign power, and to remit, entrust or turn over to its ban.” Nancy, “Abandoned Being,” pp. 43–44.
15. “Bandoun” is most often used in Middle English to refer to the relationship between the courtly lover and his sovereign lady. In a recent study, Simon Gaunt uses Agamben’s concept of bare life to think about this relationship in French texts, examining how power is articulated in the troubadour love lyric in relation to evocations of sovereign power over life and death. Ruth Evans also considers the semantic ranges of “bandoun” in her article on bare life and *Sir Orfeo*. It should be noted that while Evans’s article is indeed useful for my reading, both her approach (focusing in large part on Orfeo’s exile and the testing of his steward) and her aims (to “trouble the vexed boundaries between the medieval and the modern”) are different from mine. See Simon Gaunt, *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature: Martyrs to Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Ruth Evans, “*Sir Orfeo* and Bare Life,” in *Medieval Cultural Studies: Essays in Honour of Stephen Knight*, ed. Ruth Evans, Helen Fulton and David Matthews (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), p. 201 [198–212]. There are two further

- articles that consider Agamben's theories in relation to Middle English texts: Ruth Evans, "The Production of Space in Chaucer's London," in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. Ardis Butterfield (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2006), pp. 41–56; and William McClellan, "'ful pale face': Agamben's Biopolitical Theory and the Sovereign Subject in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*," *Exemplaria* 17 (2005): 103–34.
16. Agamben argues that sovereignty always suspends itself as potentiality "in order to realize itself as absolute actuality At the limit, pure potentiality and pure actuality are indistinguishable, and the sovereign is precisely this zone of indistinction." Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 47.
 17. The Harley 3810 version reproduces this couplet as "Sum þat wer þyder y-brouȝt / – Al dede were þey nouȝt" (373–74); the Ashmole 61 version as "Wyth men þat wer thyder brouȝht, / And semyd dede, & wer nouȝht" (380–81). For an essay that argues for popular superstitions about fairies taking the dead and dying see Dorena Allen, "Orpheus and Orfeo: The Dead and the Taken," *Medium Ævum* 33 (1964): 102–11.
 18. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 100.
 19. For Freud the uncanny (*das unheimliche*) is "related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror," but it is also, as Freud further defines it, "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar." Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth, 1957–74), 17.219 and 220 [17.218–53].
 20. Neil Cartlidge, "Sir Orfeo in the Otherworld: Courting Chaos?," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 226 [195–226]. Picking up on the paradoxical nature of the Fairy King and his realm, Cartlidge concludes that the Otherworld in *Sir Orfeo* is "uncontainably beyond expression," which follows Derek Pearsall's argument that the Otherworld in the Middle Ages (with particular reference to the Otherworld in *Sir Orfeo*) was a metaphor for "unknowableness." See Derek Pearsall, "Madness in *Sir Orfeo*," in *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays in Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, ed. Jennifer Fellows (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), pp. 54–55 [51–63]. See also, Alan J. Fletcher, "*Sir Orfeo* and the Flight from the Enchanters," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000): 141–77 (esp. 158–62).
 21. In correspondence with Kristeva's use of the term, the Middle English "abject" (*MED*, abject ppl. 1, also "object," from the Latin "abjectum") refers to that which is outcast or rejected; forsaken, but also, at the same time, to that which is shameful or wretched. See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 3–4.
 22. *Sir Orfeo*, most likely a translation of a now-lost Old French or Anglo-Norman *lai*, follows the original Greek version of the Orpheus and Eurydice story, which does not include the second loss of Eurydice. This version, evidently, survived alongside the modified version of Virgil, Ovid, Boethius, and their commentators, in which Eurydice is lost a second time when Orfeo breaks the injunction of looking back at his wife in the Underworld. Both versions, as Peter Dronke shows, were known from at least the eleventh century onwards. See Peter Dronke, "The Return of Eurydice," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 23 (1962): 198–215; Peter J. Lucas, "An Interpretation of *Sir Orfeo*," *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 6 (1972): 2 [1–9]. See also, John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), esp. pp. 146–210.
 23. Gerald of Wales gives a similar account of supernatural abduction in his early-thirteenth-century *Itinerarium Cambriæ*. The story, told from first-hand experience by the priest Eliodorus, goes that when Eliodorus was a young boy he was approached by two little men (*staturæ quasi pygmææ*) who carried him off to their beautiful underground realm where he enjoyed the lavish delights of their kingdom until, after attempting to steal gold, he was expelled. The account shares some similarities with Map's in terms of the description of the mysterious little men and their realm, but though the abduction is seemingly random, and though this underground country is

mysterious and strange, the episode has none of the terrifying repercussions for Eliodorus as Map's account does for Herla. See Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 26–31; Geraldus Cambrensis, *Itinerarium Kambriæ*, 6.75–77.

24. Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 28–29. Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.1.
25. This lack of an explicit moral message or any sense of a didactic aim is unusual for the wonder stories in Map's collection, as he seems to be generally concerned with using his accounts of the supernatural to highlight the dangers of demonic temptation or illusion. In other words, there is within Map's project a turn that Carl Watkins describes as "dissolving wonder," in which Map attempts to reappropriate the adoxic figures in his accounts into a more orthodox demonological conception of the created universe. See Watkins, *Supernatural*, pp. 203–208.
26. The appearance of little red men in both Map's *De Nugis Curialium* and Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora* suggests that such a figure may not have been wholly uncommon in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century oral culture. Katherine Briggs catalogues folktales of little red men, but these tales are very late, and though it would be difficult to trace any conclusive connections back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the possibility that they derived from stories lingering in popular tradition need not be ruled out. Walsingham, a politically conscious historian, especially in his recordings of contemporary events (1376–1420), also incorporated a number of marvels and folkloric accounts into his history. See *Thomæ Walsingham, Quondam Monachi S. Albani, Historia Anglicana*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, Rolls Series 28, 2 vols (London, 1863–64), 1.77, 113, 199–200, 263, 295, 306, 483, and 2.46, 114, 116, 117, 183–86, 188, 189, 229, 242, 251, 254, 412–13; "The Little Red Hairy Man" and "The Little Red Man" in Katherine Briggs, *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language: Part A, Folk Narratives*, 2 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970–71), 1.391–93.
27. *Thomæ Walsingham*, p. 261.
28. The idea that the loss of the boy's brain (*cerebrum*) results in his loss of sanity (*sanitas*) seems to be a way of imagining a physical rupture between the *sensibilis*, the part of the soul responsible for the intake and integration of sensory perceptions (located in the brain), and the body. Walsingham lived in a period in which there was a growing interest in surgery as a medical practice, out of which arose a widespread project of translating Latin surgical treatises into the vernacular, indicating a widening and nonprofessional readership for such texts. And though it seems unlikely that this surgery would have been considered a legitimate or plausible medical procedure, such an imagined operation may well have been influenced by this growth of interest in surgery and the proliferation of surgical treatises in the vernacular. For a discussion of the dissemination of surgical treatises see Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval & Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 153–59. For discussion of the various procedures for trepanning and other cranial surgeries see Tony Hunt, *The Medieval Surgery* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), esp. pp. 3–15; *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, 2 vols (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1997), 2.137–54.
29. *Thomæ Walsingham*, p. 261.
30. See Edmund Craster, "The Miracles of St Cuthbert at Farne," *Analecta Bollandiana* 70 (1952): 1–19. For an English translation see Edmund Craster, "The Miracles of Farne," *Archaeologia Aeliana*, Fourth Series 29 (1951): 93–107.
31. For a brief discussion of green as an Otherworldly color, see Derek Brewer, "The Colour Green," in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1997), pp. 181–90.
32. The dangers associated with partaking of food or drink from the fairy realm seems to have been a rather widespread folk motif. For example, in William of Newburgh's account of the Yorkshire countryman who encounters fairies in a hillock, discussed in [chapter 2](#), the countryman deliberately pours out the contents of a cup offered to him before running off, cup in hand. The

motif emerges in *Thomas of Erceldoune* as well, both in the romance version and in the ballad (discussed in more detail later in this chapter).

33. Craster, "Miracles of St Cuthbert," pp. 14–16.
34. In the end the account justifies its place in a miracle collection (since St. Cuthbert is implicitly credited with the healing), but considering its disruption of the orthodox saint/demon binary many miracle stories rely upon, it is by no means typical of the form. Miracle stories could both teach and entertain, and while this account does the latter exceptionally well, it does nothing of the former. There are no moral implications surrounding Richard's abduction; if he had sinned, it is unclear how, and if there is any intended didactic message, it is not obvious what that would be. Nor is there any sense of a spiritual battle; the power of the saint is shown to ultimately prevail, but there is no indication that he was in direct contention with the green-clad figures, nor are they depicted as necessarily evil or intending to do Richard any spiritual harm, though the word *diabolico* is used once. Even this, though, does little to clear things up, as a reference to their partaking of food and drink "according to the Lord's commandment" (*iuxta preceptum Domini*) makes any strictly demonic interpretation difficult. For Craster's discussion of the possible folkloric influences on the account, see "Miracles of St Cuthbert," p. 9.
35. The earliest extant text of the story, from the Lincoln Cathedral Thornton MS of c. 1440, preserves the romance version, though it has been argued that the ballad version predates the romance (which would favor the theory of its origins in local oral legend). Regardless of which came first, *Thomas the Rhymer*, as Helen Cooper has suggested, has one of the strongest claims to medieval origins of all the traditional ballads. See E. B. Lyle, "The Relationship between *Thomas the Rhymer* and *Thomas of Erceldoune*," *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 4 (1970): 23–30; Helen Cooper, "Thomas of Erceldoune: Romance as Prophecy," in *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2005), pp. 172–73 [171–87].
36. *Thomas of Erceldoune*, pp. 6–7. The romance version is preserved in four manuscripts (Lincoln Thornton MS; Cambridge University Library MS F.f.5.48; Cotton MS, Vitellius E.x.; and British Museum Lansdowne MS 762) with slight variations among them. I cite from the Thornton version throughout.
37. *Thomas the Rymer* is ballad 37 in Child's collection. See *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Francis James Child, 5 vols (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1882–98; repr. New York: Dover, 1965), 1.317–29.
38. This ambiguous sexual encounter will be discussed in [chapter 4](#).
39. The Lansdowne MS version further explains that the lady returns to her former beauty because her "lorde is so fers and fell, / that is king of this contre" (249–50) and that if their sexual relationship were to be found out she would be sent to the "brynnyng fyre of hell" (248).
40. In the ballad version the lady explains the consequences of speaking in her realm: "For gin ae word you should chance to speak, / You will neer get back to your ain countrie" (59–60).
41. Cooper, "Thomas of Erceldoune," p. 179.
42. The romance version has generally been considered as a narrative introduction to the prophecies that follow, though the existence of the ballad version, dissociated from the prophecies, attests to its potential as an independent story. For more on the question of *Thomas of Erceldoune*'s generic status see Cooper, "Thomas of Erceldoune," pp. 176–79.
43. See [chapter 1](#).
44. For more on *Yvain* and *Iwain and Gawain* as potential sources, see Loomis, *Mediæval Romance*, pp. 312–19.
45. The motif of a knight's strength waxing and waning with the sun has been consistently attached to Gawain. Chrétien's first continuator makes mention of it in *Perceval li Gallois*, and a similar

- account is given in the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. Malory, too, twice ascribes it to Gawain, as well as to the Red Knight of the Red Laundes. See Caldwell's discussion in *Eger and Grime*, pp. 111–13.
46. It is worth noting that Eger comes out looking less-than-heroic at the end of the romance, but this is inherent within the nature of the disguise plot, as someone necessarily has to be left out of the action at the end—at the point of revenge or redemption. Despite this structural condition, however, the author does his best to depict Eger as a good knight, noting in the opening lines that he is “soe well proued” (35), and wins so much “worshippe” (51), that he is praised “Aboue all knights of high degree” (52).
 47. Siân Echard argues that Map's work is “polygraphic,” offering not only a wide range of literary forms, but also creative hybridizations of those forms. See “Map's Metafiction: Author, Narrator and Reader in *De Nugis Curialium*,” *Exemplaria* 8 (1996): 288 [287–314].
 48. Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 234–35.
 49. Map's prologue to the tale specifies his audience as palace officials, but then notes that, for recreation, they often like to “ad humilium inclinari colloquia,” and in acceding to these desires, he notes that his tale is a retelling of an old song he had once heard. The possibility remains, of course, that Map invented an oral past for the tale to lend it a certain authenticity or popular appeal, but whether he invented it or not, the convention points to a culture of “old” stories being retold (and recorded) in these oral/literate circles. See Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 211–47.
 50. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 670–71.
 51. This Osbert may be the Osbert Fitz Hugh who founded a priory at Westwood early in the reign of Henry II. He is also mentioned in charters of 1137–39 and 1140–44. See Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, p. 670 n2.
 52. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), esp. pp. 7–23 and 383–450.
 53. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 94 and 96.
 54. Agamben sees this “special proximity” between sovereign and *homo sacer* portrayed with “extraordinary vividness” in the relationship between the king and the werewolf in Marie de France's *Bisclavret*. *Homo Sacer*, pp. 100 and 107–108.
 55. Evans further argues that like the werewolf in *Bisclavret*, Orfeo becomes the “medieval ‘wolf's head,’ who has been banned by the city but who remains bound by its laws.” Evans, “Sir Orfeo,” pp. 204 [203–208].
 56. Thorlac Turville-Petre reads these details as interpolations by the Auchinleck scribe, providing an “extreme example of the lengths to which revisers will go to underline the theme of Englishness.” See *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 116 [109–41].
 57. See Edward Kennedy, “Sir Orfeo as *Rex Inutilis*,” *Annuaire Mediaevale* 17 (1976): 88 [88–110]; Oren Falk, “The Son of Orfeo: Kingship and Compromise in a Middle English Romance,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 (2000): 247–74.
 58. See Natalie Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II, 1321–1326* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 43–49; Kennedy, “Sir Orfeo,” p. 108; Falk, “Son of Orfeo,” p. 251.
 59. Trevisa gives: “he forsook þe companye of lordes, and drowh hym to harlottes, to syngers and to gestoures, to carters, to delveres and to dykers, to rowers, schipmen and bootmen, and to oper craftsmen.” *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, 8.298–99.
 60. W. M. Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III: Crown and Political Society in England, 1327–1377* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. xi.
 61. See Roy Martin Haines, *King Edward II: Edward of Caernarfon, His Life, His Reign, and its Aftermath, 1284–1330* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), pp. 226–31.

62. See Freud, "The Uncanny," pp. 226–27; Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 5–7.
63. See [chapter 4](#) for further discussion.
64. Other fairy figures in romance abide by this sort of ethical code, including the fairy mistress in the *Launfal* romances, Oberon in *Huon of Burdeux*, and Melusine in both her verse and prose romances. These figures will be picked up in the next chapter.
65. *Thomæ Walsingham*, p. 262.
66. For more on the miracles attributed to St. John of Beverley see Susan E. Wilson, *The Life and After-Life of St. John of Beverley: The Evolution of the Cult of an Anglo-Saxon Saint* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), esp. pp. 143–229.
67. In *Eger and Grime*, it should be noted, the release from the structure of the ban comes about not through any form of adoxic mercy, but through the conditions of Gray Steel's humanization and eventual death.
68. The analogues to the Wife's tale, in which she turns out to be a human girl enchanted by the nigromancy of a wicked stepmother, include Gower's "Tale of Florent," the fifteenth-century *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, and the *Marriage of Sir Gawain* from the Percy Folio. See *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, EETS, e.s. 81–82, 2 vols (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900–1901), 1.74–86; *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1995).
69. Such a choice, unique to Chaucer's version of this story (the analogues all set the choice as whether to be beautiful at night or during the day), reinforces the woman's teachings on the importance of the inner self over outward display.

4 Fairy Mistresses: Gifts and Taboos

1. Spenser, in fact, seems to have borrowed directly from *Sir Thopas* in constructing the frame of his epic romance—Arthur's quest for Gloriana. See King, *Faerie Queene*, pp. 9–11.
2. The seminal anthropological study on gifts is Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don* (1924), and on taboos, James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890). See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (Glencoe: Free Press, 1954); Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1890; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Other important studies include Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Random House, 1967), and Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).
3. For considerations of gifts in romance see Ad Putter, "Gifts and Commodities in *Sir Amadace*," *Review of English Studies* n.s. 51 (2000): 371–94; and Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). In light of the fairy mistress romances in question, however, this chapter challenges Kay's argument that romances exemplify a "poetics of the commodity," as opposed to a "poetics of the gift" that Kay considers characteristic of the *chansons de geste* (pp. 200–30). Analyses of taboos in literary works are virtually nonexistent, though the commonplace fairy mistress taboo has long been recognized. The sole full-length study devoted to taboos, John Reinhard's *The Survival of Geis in Mediaeval Romance* (1933), is less concerned with analyzing taboos in romance than with locating their Irish sources and analogues.
4. James Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, Undertaken by the Command of His Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere*, 3 vols (London: H. Hughes, 1785), 1.286 and 409–11; 2.203. See also, Hutton Webster, *Taboo: A Sociological Study* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1942), pp. vii–viii and 3–4.

5. The converse in Polynesian is *noa*, which means “common” or “generally accessible.” See Webster, *Taboo*, pp. 2–3; and Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. James Strachey (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950), p. 18.
6. Middle English, therefore, never borrowed the negative sense of *sacer* as “accursed.”
7. Following Reinhard, *geis* is the more common word for “taboo” in romance criticism, though implicit within this usage is the suggestion that these prohibitions are lingering motifs from Celtic myth. See Reinhard, *Survival of Geis*, p. 3.
8. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p. 18; and Bernhard Maier, *Dictionary of Celtic Religion and Culture*, trans. Cyril Edwards (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), pp. 126–27; David Greene, “Tabu in Early Irish Narrative,” in *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium*, ed. Hans Bekker-Nielsen (Odense: Odense University Press, 1979), pp. 9–19.
9. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p. 22 [20–22].
10. See Harf-Lancner, *Fées*, p. 34; and [chapter 1](#) on beauty as a characteristic quality of both male and female fairies.
11. This, perhaps, is one of the reasons why Sir Thopas’s decision to love an elf-queen is so ridiculous, since he does so before actually setting eyes on one. See James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 71.
12. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 88–89. This episode will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
13. Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 154–55.
14. See Amanda Hopkins, “‘wordy vnthur wede’: Clothing, Nakedness and the Erotic in Some Romances of Medieval Britain,” in *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ed. Amanda Hopkins and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2007), p. 63 [53–70]. See also, E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 171–72.
15. For a discussion of the English adaptations of this scene, and for a reading of why “for hete” the fairy mistress has her mantle down, see Robert Allen Rouse, “‘Some Like it Hot’: The Medieval Eroticism of Heat,” in *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, pp. 71–81.
16. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Freud argued that “visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused,” and that scopophilia, that sort of looking that produces this excitation, is associated with subjecting the naked body to a curious gaze. It should be stressed, however, that not all women in romance are invariably subjected to male scopophilia, as indeed, as Helen Cooper has shown, it is often the heroines of romance who gaze on their male love-objects. See Sigmund Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 7.156–57 [133–243]; Helen Cooper, “Love Before Troilus,” in *Writings on Love in the English Middle Ages*, ed. Helen Cooney (Houndsmill: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), pp. 34–41 [25–43].
17. In religious contexts, for example, nakedness can be associated with purity and sanctity. See Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), esp. pp. 53–77.
18. Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 3; Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. xi–xii and 180–82; and Putter, “Gifts and Commodities,” p. 184.
19. “Commodity exchange,” as C. A. Gregory explains, “establishes objective quantitative relationships between the objects transacted, while gift exchange establishes personal qualitative

- relationships between the subjects transacting.” See *Gifts and Commodities* (London: Academic Press, 1982), p. 41.
20. Hyde, *The Gift*, pp. xiv and 56–73.
 21. See Luce Irigaray, “Women on the Market,” in *This Sex which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 170–91; Strathern, *Gender of the Gift*, pp. 311–18.
 22. See Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 37–43; Hyde, *The Gift*, pp. 15–17.
 23. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 24.
 24. Seemingly undemanding (if illogical) taboos of this nature are a mainstay in fairy mistress stories both within and beyond romance. Eadric Wild’s Otherworldly bride, for instance, insists that she will love him so long as he never reproaches her in the name of her sisters. Walter Map also tells of the Welsh Gwestin, who enjoys the favors of a supernatural woman on the condition that he is to never strike her with his bridle. This is, perhaps, an early allusion to the notion that supernatural creatures are allergic to iron. See Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 148–55 and 155–59; Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud, ed., *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 194–5.
 25. Cooper, *Romance*, p. 209.
 26. That *real* gifts have a direct appeal to fantasy, and that they are often too good to be true, is amply revealed in the actual-world fairy mistress frauds reported to have been orchestrated by conmen in the sixteenth century. The standard racket entailed taking money from the credulous in exchange of setting up meetings with a fairy queen who wished to bestow her favors on them. For further details see Cooper, *Romance*, p. 209.
 27. See *Lays*, pp. 60–61 [42–79].
 28. See *Lais*, ed. Ewert, pp. 85–86; *Lais*, trans. Burgess and Busby, p. 88.
 29. Accounts of incubi impregnating unassuming women were extraordinarily common throughout the Middle Ages. Augustine, like many after him, linked this phenomenon with the theory of the neutral angels, who were cast down to the sublunar sphere during the war in heaven (see [chapter 1](#)). For a discussion of incubi in romance see Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2001), pp. 94 and 218–28; Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, pp. 114–16, 227–8. See also, Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), esp. pp. 52–6. Also, though it is notoriously difficult to pin down medieval origins for many of the popular ballads, it is worth noting that a few contain male supernatural lovers who are both seductive and dangerous, including “The Elfin Knight,” “Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight,” and “Hind Etin.” See Child, *Ballads*, 1.6–20, 22–62, 360–71.
 30. See *Lays*, pp. 328–29 [326–47].
 31. Corinne Saunders argues that here “rape is reversed, a hero is created and the faery knight is reclaimed for the woman.” See Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, pp. 218 [213–18].
 32. See Corinne Saunders, “Erotic Magic: The Enchantress in Middle English Romance,” in *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, p. 50 [38–52].
 33. For the parallel episodes in Malory’s source, see *Queste del Saint Graal*, pp. 104–10 and 180–82; *Lancelot-Grail*, 4.34–36 and 4.57–58.
 34. Saunders, “Erotic Magic,” p. 50.
 35. The word “false” has particularly strong connotations in Middle English (*MED*, fals, adj. 1, from Latin falsum; OF fals, faus), meaning not only untrue, but also treacherous, disloyal, or faithless, as of the devil. See text that follows for more on negative gifts.

36. See Saunders's discussion of this episode in *Rape and Ravishment*, pp. 247–48; Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, pp. 251–3. See also, Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses*, p. 71.
37. This form of eroticism is not too uncommon in fairy mistress romances, and Saunders' reading may help explain the unexpected scenes of fairy mistress rape (or quasi-rape) as found not only in *Thomas*, but also in *Graelent*, *Partonope*, and Wace's account in his *Roman de Rou* of the mysterious woman who sends a knight hurling into the branches of a tree *after* he had raped her (3.561–610). See also, Cooper, *Romance*, p. 214; Saunders, "Erotic Magic," pp. 42–44.
38. See [chapter 1](#) for more on fairy horses and bells.
39. See [chapter 1](#) for more on Cassodorien's equivocal fairy/demon nature. As mentioned, there are some romance protagonists with incubus fathers, but these are concerned primarily with the hero's overcoming of his evil nature to achieve a happy ending in accordance with established Christian and chivalric practices. It may be argued that Richard betrays a certain savagery in the romance (in his taste for Saracen flesh, for instance), and indeed it may be further argued that his ruthlessness could be linked to his quasi-fairy/quasi-demonic origins, but even considering this, he is never depicted as "evil" in the romance, and certainly not as diabolic.
40. See Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146–1223* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 91–100. See also, Joseph Stevenson's Preface in Gerald of Wales, *Concerning the Instruction of Princes*, trans. Joseph Stevenson (London: Seeleys, 1858; repr. Felinfach: J. M. F. Books, 1991), pp. 5–6.
41. See Geraldus Cambrensis, *De Principis Instructione*, 8.301; Gerald of Wales, *Concerning the Instruction of Princes*, p. 98.
42. Geraldus Cambrensis, *De Principis Instructione*, 8.301; Gerald of Wales, *Concerning the Instruction of Princes*, p. 98.
43. There is evidence to suggest that such a legend did indeed circulate in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and possibly beyond. In addition to Gerald's account of Richard's own mention of it, he also records two other analogous references. In the first, he puts into the mouth of the patriarch Heraclius (who had come to England to instruct Henry II) a statement concerning the king's sons: "quia de diabolo venerunt, et ad diabolum ibunt." And later, when Gerald describes a meeting between Henry II and Bernard of Clairvaux, he has the saint give a nearly identical prophecy concerning Henry himself: "De diabolo venit, et ad diabolum ibit." Also, Caesarius of Heisterbach, the thirteenth-century Cistercian, alludes to the legend in his *Dialogus Miraculorum*. In his discussion of the origin and nature of incubi and succubae he says: "Legitur etiam Merlinus propheta Britannorum ex incubo daemone, et sanctimoniali femina generatus. Nam et reges, qui usque hodie regnant in eadem Britannia, quae nunc Anglia dicitur, de matre phantastica descendisse referuntur." [We read also that Merlin, the prophet of the Britons, was born from an incubus demon and a nun; and even the kings now ruling in Britain, which we call England, are said to be descended from a phantom mother.] See Geraldus Cambrensis, *De Principis Instructione*, 8.211 and 8.309; Gerald of Wales, *Concerning the Instruction of Princes*, pp. 47 and 103; Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. Josef Strange, 2 vols (Cologne: J. M. Heberle, 1851), 1.124; Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, trans. H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1929), 1.139.
44. The author also cites Aristotle and (oddly enough) St. Paul in order to argue that since the human wit cannot fully comprehend the designs of nature, it is therefore foolish not to believe in the existence of "meruaylles." The allusion to St. Paul may be in reference to Romans 1.20: "invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur sempiterna quoque eius virtus et divinitas ut sint inexcusabiles." [For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. His eternal power also and divinity: so that they are inexcusable.] See Jean d'Arras, *Mélusine*, pp. 2–4.

45. This “juste & true cronykle,” along with “many other bokes,” was given to the author (the text tells us) from his patron the Duke of Berry. In addition to the Robert story, the author also tells of “bonnes dames” who often appeared in Poitou, thus providing further evidence of such supernatural activity (1.1–6). Couldrette’s verse version, along with its English translation, leaves out the account of Sir Robert, though both mention receiving a source text from an unnamed patron who wished it to be put into rhyme so that it might be more widely heard (58–82; 129–39).
46. This may be a mistaken ascription to Bede, as there is no such statement in his extant works. See Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 86–87 n7.
47. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 88–91.
48. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 730–31. Gervase also gives an account of the extraordinarily beautiful Dame de Château de l’Épervier (*De domina castri de Esperver*), who, much like Gerald’s story of Henry II’s mother, continually arrived sufficiently late for mass so as to miss the celebration of the sacraments. One day, though, her husband had her restrained at the moment of the Consecration of the Host, at which point she was lifted *spiritu diabolico* into the air and flew away through the chapel roof (its still-damaged tower, Gervase says, being proof of the story’s validity). Such an account is intended to illustrate the dangers of such mysterious and beautiful women, and to make his intentions clear he begins the account by paraphrasing 2 Corinthians: “frequens est ut angeli satanae in angelos lucis se transformet et in humanis mentibus aliquid diabolicae immisionis nutrient” [It often happens that the angels of Satan transform themselves into angels of light, and foster something of diabolical origin in human minds.] Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 664–65. Cf. 2 Corinthians 11.14.
49. Henno was probably the Norman baron Hamo “Dentatus” (*aux Dents*), who was a leader of the rebellion against William the Conqueror in 1047. See Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, p. 344 n2.
50. Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 344–49.
51. This reference to the “commyn talking of the peple” proves to be a particularly effective world-constructing strategy, for it provides a rare glimpse into the intra-world oral legend surrounding Melusine—the romance’s internal folklore literally revealed within the structures of the text-world. It is noteworthy that “the peple” consider a “spyryte of the fairy” as someone for whom penance is somehow necessary, as if she were inherently associated with sin or the devil, for this is precisely what happens when this sort of internal folklore is revealed in *Partonope*. When Partonope’s mother learns of his secret love affair she explains to the king how he has been ensnared by “a pyngre of ffeyre” and charmed by “þe deuyllys Enchaument” (5055–76), and when she complains to the Bishop of Paris about the matter she claims that he has been “taken wyth ffendys of ffayre” (5656). However, in both *Melusine* and *Partonope*, though these beliefs show some indication of the close proximity between fairies and demons, they are ultimately proven to be wrong: Melusine does not engage in penance on Saturdays (it is a “fals reporte,” 297) and Melior is neither a fiend nor a fairy. Something similar also happens in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*, in which Constance is described as both an evil spirit and a fairy. Donegild claims that “The mooder was an elf, by aventure / Ycomen, by charmes or by sorcerie” (2.754–55), a statement proven to be untrue, *false* (with all its Middle English connotations), at a meta-world level. Indeed, what instances such as these show is the extent to which authors can construct text-worlds in which there is a complex interplay between implicit and explicit fictional facts, where the false beliefs of characters within the text can be factual insofar as they are actually held beliefs, but they can simultaneously be nonactual, or nonfacts, in that they conflict with the facts of the text-world established at a meta-world level. For more on this sort of interplay see Ronen, *Possible Worlds*, pp. 35–42 and 176–81; Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, pp. 148–52.
52. In Couldrette’s *Melusine* (70–78), and in its English translation (142–47), the patron who commissioned the work (unnamed) is lineally descended from Melusine. For more on Jean of

Berry and the romance's historico-political context, see Harf-Lancner, *Fées*, pp. 170 and 176–78. See also [chapter 1](#).

53. As Pressine's "gyfte" reflects, curses always constitute negative gifts, though perhaps it may be best to think of curses as a subset, for while the *negativeness* of curses may become invested in objects, they are always initiated by illocutionary acts. A ban, too, operates in close proximity to both curses and negative gifts, for a curse effects a ban, as does the giving (and receiving) of negative gifts.
54. Geoffrey, Melusine says, will prove "noble and valyaunt," Raymond will become the "Erle of Forestz" and Theoderic will hold the lordships of "Partenay, Vernon, Rochelle, & the port there" (318). These fortunes are also outlined in the romance's preamble, which states that Geoffrey was the lord of Lusignan, Uryan king of Cyprus, Guyon king of Armenia, Raynold king of Bohemia, and Anthony duke of Luxembourg (6).
55. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 7–11; Webster, *Taboo*, pp. 17–24. See also [chapter 1](#).
56. Gail Gibson, for instance, highlights the ritualized prohibitions surrounding the childbirth of Margaret of Anjou, wife of Henry VI. When she was in childbed all men were to be excluded, and a curtain, which was not to be opened until after the queen's lying-in period, was to separate the birthing place from the other royal apartments. Taboos of this sort appear in romance as well. In *Bevis of Hamton* the hero offers to help Josiane in labor, but she sends him away, claiming that no man should see her "pryute" (3367–74). In the Anglo-Norman version, however, this prohibition is given more explicit ritualistic significance: " 'Sire,' dist ele, 'ma foi, nanyll! / N'e dreit ne lei, ne nus ne avum oi. / K'enfant de femme dust home ver. / Alez vus en, celez vus de ci, / Si lessez damedeu convenr; / Sente Marie serra a le departer.' " (2702–707) ["Sire, by faith, no! There is no religion or law that we have ever heard of that allows a man to see the child[birth] of a woman. Go away, hide yourself from this, and let God take care of me, Holy Mary will be at the delivery." (trans. from McCracken)]. A scene that similarly shows the ritualized prohibition against men seeing women in childbed occurs in the thirteenth-century *Roman de Silence* (2000–2008). See *The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, ed. Eugen Kölbing, EETS e.s. 46, 48, 65 (London: N. Trübner, 1885–94; repr. in one vol. Millwood: Kraus, 1978), p. 171; *Der Anglonormannische Boeve de Haumtone*, ed. Albert Stimming (Halle: Niemeyer, 1889), p. 95; Heldris de Cornäuille, *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, ed. and trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992), pp. 94–95; Gail McMurray Gibson, "Scene and Obscene: Seeing and Performing Late Medieval Childbirth," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29 (1999): 9 [7–24]; Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), esp. pp. 77–91. See also, Webster, *Taboo*, pp. 49–109; Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 66–67.
57. The arbitrariness of Pressine's taboo is further enforced by the fact that *only* Elynas is excluded from the place of childbirth, not men generally. Indeed, we are told that Nathas, Elynas's son, is present at the moment of Melusine's and her sisters' births: "The kynge Elynas was nat thanne present at that place, but kynge Nathas his sone was there, and beheld hys thre sustirs" (11).
58. For more on the observance of incest rules in the Middle Ages, see Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), esp. pp. 41–52.
59. See Donald Maddox, *Fictions of Identity in Medieval France* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 177–78; Spiegel, "Maternity and Monstrosity," pp. 115–17.
60. See Hyde, *The Gift*, pp. 72–73.
61. Magical devices used to detect faults in women are not wholly uncommon in romance. Ulrich's *Lanzelet* includes a magic mantle that only fits truly blameless women. In this instance, however, it is not presented as a negative gift, for it is used to show the perfection of Iblis, the heroine (5679–6228). A similar mantle also appears in the widely popular tale of Craddock's wife. The

story survives only in the Percy Folio's *The Boy and Mantle*, in which all the women of Arthur's court, save Craddock's wife, fail the test. Even here, though, it is not depicted as a negative gift, as the emphasis is on its virtue of showing men which women are unfaithful. Interestingly, too, the boy also produces a magic drinking horn that the men drink from, but this only shows which men have been cuckolded, not which have been unfaithful. In Caxton's preface to the *Morte Darthur* he says that this mantle can be seen at Dover Castle, along with Gawain's skull. See *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, ed. John W. Hales and Frederick J. Furnivall, 3 vols (London: N. Trübner, 1867–68), 2.301–11. See also, Cooper, *Romance*, pp. 314–16.

62. For the parallel episode in the prose *Tristan*, see *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*, 2.129–31; *The Romance of Tristan*, pp. 137–38; and [chapter 1](#). Another instance of negative gifts in the *Morte Darthur* is the episode in which Sir Pyonell “enpoysonde sertayn appylls for to enpoysen sir Gawayne.” As it turns out, only Sir Patryse falls victim, but Gawain recognizes that they were intended for him: “all folks,” he says, “that knowith my condicion undirstonde that I love well fruyte.” Ultimately, it is a further example of how such negative gifts can function as plot devices for generating further narrative action, for in this episode it is Guinevere, not Pyonell, who is condemned, and Lancelot must eventually come to her rescue (2.1048–60; XVIII:3–8).
63. Saunders, “Erotic Magic,” pp. 46–47.
64. John Bouchier, Lord Berners, *Arthur of Little Britain*, ed. E. V. Utterson (London, 1814), pp. 155–58.
65. Proserpyne also gives Florence the gift that she “shal resemble to me both in face, in body, in countenaunce” (47). It is a gift that proves to be particularly handy when Florence is to be married against her will to the emperor, for Proserpyne takes her place at the ceremony, and when the bishop attempts to place the ring on her finger, “sodeynly she was vanysshed awaye, so that none knew where she was become” (395–402).
66. See Woodcock, *Fairy in The Faerie Queene*, p. 38 [37–38].
67. See Cooper, *Romance*, p. 198, and on nonfunctioning magic, pp. 137–72.
68. Cooper, *Romance*, p. 198.
69. In *Lanval* the hero is praised not only for his largesse, but also for his valor and prowess (21–22). In *Landevale* he is a knight of “much myght” who also gives “yeftyls largely” (19–22).
70. See Georges Duby, “Youth in Aristocratic Society,” in *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 120 [112–22].
71. See Stephen Knight, *Arthurian Literature and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 74–77; and Herbert Moller, “The Social Causation of the Courtly Love Complex,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1 (1958–59): 137–63.
72. Duby, “Youth in Aristocratic Society,” p. 119. In a useful reading of Chrétien's *Yvain*, Stephen Knight concludes that “it is hardly surprising that the knight errant, the classic member of the lower nobility, sees marriage as a path to success, and that Chrétien's dream-like representation of this process is a crucial part of his ideological power.” Knight, *Arthurian Literature and Society*, p. 77.
73. See Erik Kooper, “Love and Marriage in the Middle English Romances,” in *Companion to Middle English Romance*, ed. Henk Aertsen and Alasdair A. MacDonald (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1990), pp. 172–73 [171–87]; Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elborg Foster (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 11–15.
74. See Elizabeth Archibald, “Women and Romance,” in *Companion to Middle English Romance*, p. 163 [153–69].
75. See Cooper, “Love Before Troilus,” p. 31; and Cooper, *Romance*, pp. 218–68.

76. See Jacques Le Goff, "Melusina: Mother and Pioneer," in *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 218–19 [205–22].
77. In *Desiré*, too, the hero is encouraged by his fairy mistress to "despendre bien largement" (249), and when he returns to the human world we are told: "Molt despendi et molt dona; / De nul bien fet ne s'atarga. / Plus donna il en .I. seul mois / Qu'en demi an ne fist li rois" (259–62) [He spent lavishly and distributed many gifts; / He did not shrink from any good deed. / He gave away more in a single month / Than the king did in half a year.]
78. Though the fairy mistress in *Desiré* insists on the hero's general knightly excellence, any form of a precise taboo is left unspecified. It could be surmised, though, that it is something similar to the taboos in *Launfal* and *Graelent*, for *Desiré* is abandoned when he confesses her to a hermit (233–58 and 319–35).
79. Yvain, another knight whose quasi-fairy mistress both provides his erotic fulfillment and facilitates his socioeconomic ascension, is similarly banished when he breaks her injunction—a banishment, indeed, that effects his ensuing madness. Cf. *Iwain and Gawain*, ed. Albert B. Friedman and Norman T. Harrington, EETS o.s. 254 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 41–45 (l. 1499–1666).
80. Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 15 and 292.
81. Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100–1300* (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1997), p. 74.
82. Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 48.
83. Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, pp. 106–107.
84. See *Lancelot*, 1.275–79; *Lancelot-Grail*, 2.305–306. Also, for a recent discussion of the *Val sans Retour*, and enchanted entrapments in romance generally, see Larrington, *Enchantresses*, pp. 22–23 and 51–60.
85. An episode of similar entrapment occurs in the *Morte* when Morgan, for love of Lancelot, imprisons him in her castle (1.256–59; VI:3–4), and Nenyve, too, through her "subtyle worchyng," entraps Merlin in an enchanted cave, and for good (1.125–26; IV:1). For more on Malory's Morgan see Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses*, pp. 83–5; Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, pp. 247–51.
86. For more on the *Launfal* romances as social critiques see, in particular, Dinah Hazell, "The Blinding of Gwennere: Thomas Chestre as Social Critic," *Arthurian Literature* 20 (2003): 123–43; David Chamberlain, "Marie de France's Arthurian *Lai*: Subtle and Political," in *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend: Essays in Honour of Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 15–34.
87. *Bishop Percy's Folio*, 1.164 [1.142–64]. Cf. *Landevale*, 535–36; *Lanval*, 645–46.
88. The woodsman carries the boar's head far and wide in order to tell of his encounter with Guingamor, and eventually he gives it to his present king. It then becomes (as an authenticating device contained within the fiction of the text itself) the reason the *lai* is composed to begin with (670–78).

Conclusion

1. The sole exception to this, as discussed in [chapter 2](#), is the *Draco Normannicus*, in which the narrative begins with Arthur in Avalon and imagines his return.
2. The few significant exceptions have been noted in the introduction.

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